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FOR ONE
AND
THE WORLD



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BY

M. BETHAM-EDWARDS

AUTHOR OF

“LOVE AND MIRAGE,” “NEXT OF KIN—WANTED,” ETC.

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FOR ONE AND THE WORLD

CHAPTER I.

PHYSICIAN AND PATIENT.

A CURIOUS and striking contrast was presented by the appearance of a large country house one winter evening.

Whilst the hall was brilliantly illuminated and resounded with the noise of music and dancing, the remainder, feebly lighted, hushed and desolate, seemed to suggest the presence of dire sickness or even death itself. So straggling and roomy was this seventeenth-century manor-house that the occupants of one wing needed to hardly know what their neighbours in the other were doing. With doors well closed, a bridal party might make merry, and a funeral banquet be held under the same roof at the same time.

But when such precautions were not taken, windows left down, doors ajar, then tell-tale sounds would travel as they did to-night; snatches of waltz and mazurka, merry talk and laughter of the dancers, tripping feet,

chinking of champagne glasses. At intervals they reached the ears of the occupants of the left wing; for noiseless and dim as was this portion of the house, it was not tenantless. In an upper room, charming enough in itself although ill-furnished, ill-lighted, and ill-warmed, sat a young lady and a sickly-looking lad, perhaps ten years younger than herself, playing chess. Judging from the meanness of their surroundings, and their isolation, these two should have been subordinates in this opulent house, poor dependants precluded by their humble position from any share in the festivity going on below. Yet there was an unmistakable, even striking air of distinction about both that belied such a surmise. The girl, whose age might be twenty-four or five, was one of those fair, thoughtful, northern types tolerably familiar to us in these days. She was evidently some Scandinavian or Slavonic maiden who had come westward for purposes of study; but whatever her quest—a scientific curriculum, the pursuit of art, or mere culture—such grave preoccupations had not unsexed, much less unbeautified her; the fairness of her complexion, its brilliant rosiness, the noble brow, clear blue eyes, and well-cut if slightly massive features, possessed all that was needed of feminine witchery, whilst the casual observer must have recognised force of character and intensity of will, rare even

in women who enter the lists with the other sex. She wore a beautifully fitting dress, very quiet in colour, and the masses of her wavy, pale golden hair, seemed to light up the place.

Her companion, a lad of fifteen or thereabouts, had not a commonplace look either. He was small for his age and of delicate appearance, but the fine, black, dreamy eye and sensitive mouth redeemed what else was insignificant in his physiognomy. He stooped slightly, and even the exertion of moving the chessmen seemed a trouble to him, whilst a painful look of helplessness and nonchalance betokened some chronic malady or physical defect. Intelligence, vivacity, were there; initiative, will, seemed wanting. Almost childlike in many ways, he yet had that outward precocity so often seen in children born of elderly or invalid parents.

"What is that noise?" he asked, suddenly, as the opening of doors below let in the festive sounds.

His companion smiled sarcastically.

"It is the first ball of the season. Had you forgotten?" she replied.

"Harpie never told me she was going to give a ball to-night," he said, with an aggrieved look. "She never tells me anything."

"But we never need be told of balls or other events beforehand," she added, still

gay and sarcastic, "our supper-tray yonder tells us that. See, it has been standing there covered up for hours."

"The bread-and-butter is dry and everything bad when there are balls," the lad said, petulantly. "I hate them, Nadine, don't you?"

"As much as we get of them here, yes."

"Yet I like them for one thing, Nadine, we are left to ourselves. I can say what I like to you. I have something very, very secret to say to-night."

He rose and gently opened the door to see that no eavesdropper lurked behind, then, returning to his seat, fumbled in his pockets and looked irresolute. Such cautiousness and hesitancy seemed to indicate a disclosure of no little moment, and Nadine glanced at him with a keen, questioning look. Should she at last hear some of those inquiries looked for so long and anxiously? Was he slowly waking up to realities, piercing through the mystery that enveloped his life? She was quickly undeceived. Still keeping an eye on the door, he produced a dog's-eared school-book and some loose sheets of paper.

"Don't tell Harpie," he whispered; "she would never let me go on. Just see what I have done; I found this book among some lumber upstairs, and it is more amusing than chess. Euclid they call it."

Still holding the precious volume, he turned

over its opening pages, and at the same time opened his manuscript. "I don't believe I have made a single mistake," he said, exultingly. "Just look, Nadine; but no, another time, we will talk now." He dropped his voice to a low, timid key: "I want to go right through the book, but Harpie must not know. She never lets me learn anything. She says it brings on my fainting fits."

It was instructive to note the effect of that name "Harpie," on Nadine. The girl's serene face was not merely clouded over at the sound, its expression for the moment became utterly different. Distrust, vindictiveness, even repulsion, were transitorily written on those beautiful, ingenuous features. She seemed to breathe contaminated air, to hear curses, and see unholy-visions. Her companion evidently did not observe the glamour. The name so constantly on his lips, oftentimes so fretfully uttered, was nevertheless a pet name to him, as yet by no means suggestive of the Greek fury it recalled.

"Mrs. Harpfield will be none the wiser," Nadine laughed, scornfully. "Thank Heaven she no more knows what Euclid is than your black kitten. But let me just glance at your papers. Let me see if you really know what you are about."

She spread the sheets of paper before her on the table, leaned her head on her hand and inspected them minutely, the lad

all the while watching her with an expression of mingled suspense and triumph. Was he indeed on the luminous track he supposed, or merely the victim of an intellectual will-o'-the-wisp? The problems he had solved with that delicious sense of mental insight, were they not so many stepping-stones to higher truth, and if in reality he had not deceived himself, might he not, having set foot on the ladder, reach the top? All this his eyes said as he followed hers, breathlessly awaiting the verdict.

Nadine's face showed even more emotion, as with quick, practised glance she verified one solution after another; hope changed to assurance, assurance to delight. Checking her first impulse to congratulate and to exult, she very quietly folded the papers and put them in her pocket.

"I am very glad you have at last found a study that interests you," she said, in a matter-of-fact way. "A study, too, that never comes to an end. We shall not lack for amusement on wet days, now."

The lad thought and thought.

"It seems odd that it should be so, but these problems interest me just because they have nothing to do with human beings. Were you and I living up in the moon, or in some bright star—creatures quite differently made, perhaps without arms and legs, perhaps having no body at all, nothing to make us

dread heat or cold, or ever need a doctor, Euclid would be still Euclid to us. I don't like men and women, as you know."

"Wait to say that till you have seen more of them ; till you have attained man's estate, and go forth into the world."

"Harpie will never let me do that," he said, in a careless, resigned way.

"When we are of age we all act for ourselves."

"Not when we have fainting fits," Philip rejoined.

"Nonsense !" Nadine answered. "The law is made for those who faint, for those who see with one eye, or limp with one foot, as well as the rest. But I am going to cure you of your fainting fits."

"You will never make me like other boys," he said, half wistfully. "When I said just now that I did not like men and women, I meant that I am jealous of them. I shall never be what a man should—strong, brave, able to battle with anything ; that is why I was so happy in working out those problems. There was nothing to make me feel envy, or pity, or indignation. When I read about William Tell I feel what a mere nothing I am ; as if I belonged to a different species."

"There are not many William Tells in the world, my poor Philip. Do not make yourself unhappy because you cannot be the one hero of an age."

"Then again, books on natural history make me sad. I should like every lion to be roaming the forest, and not a single creature to be ill-used or made captive. And stories of adventure, how cruel they often are ! History, too ; what good can come of reading about tyrants and battles ? No, Nadine, let me have this instead," and, as he spoke, he once more caressed his shabby volume. "Let me go on and on till I seem to have left the world behind, and to stand on a lofty mountain-top."

"I will see what mathematical books I have, and we will go to work systematically," Nadine said ; "but now suppose we have supper."

They moved to a small table at the farther end of the room. Nadine, reading-lamp in hand, uncovered the tray and surveyed its contents with a supercilious look. There was a plateful of bread-and-butter, evidently cut some hours before, two drumsticks of a chicken garnished with ham, a stale seed-cake, Philip's portion of milk, and exactly one glass of light foreign wine in a decanter.

The pair, however, were merry enough, and never before had Nadine found her young charge so companionable. Sometimes he would fall into a dreamy, lethargic state, from which no efforts could rouse him ; at others, his head would droop, and he would sink into a transitory coma. To-night a

stranger need have suspected nothing abnormal about the bright-eyed, animated lad.

They had hardly begun the meal when the door was burst open suddenly, and a richly-dressed woman came in.

"Harpie!" cried Philip. "I thought you were dancing. How fine you are!"

He turned round, inspecting the intruder's ball-dress with naïve interest and admiration.

It was easy to see, in spite of studied personal appearance and the most carefully elaborated manners, speech, and deportment, that Mrs. Harpfield had not always worn silks and velvet. This well-dressed, perfectly-gloved lady had, indeed, no more to do with the real world of fashion than the faultless belles in wax at Madame Tussaud's. As she spoke, moved, or walked, an indescribable fugitive something proclaimed the vulgar beginnings of an existence now spent in the lap of luxury and the zenith of favoured fortune. She was neither young nor old—that is to say, she appeared quite elderly to the youthful, and quite youthful to octogenarians. To beauty she had no pretension; but has not a wit of our own day declared that no well-dressed woman ever looks ugly? Mrs. Harpfield—for although neither wife nor widow, she accepted the style accorded to the first female servant in a large household—was hardly ugly. But for the strong personality forcing itself on all

with whom she came in contact, no one would have thought twice about her appearance—that personality so expressive of domination, will, and a certain kind of power, had an emphasis and accentuation that made up for want of outward attractiveness. There was some incongruity in such an appearance—the elegantly-made dress of crimson satin covered with rich Spanish lace, and the indescribable something that recalled her position as house-keeper. Such sense of contradictoriness was nullified by the perfect aplomb and self-possession of the wearer. Mrs. Harpfield had evidently given up the habit of deprecating criticism long ago, and compelled outsiders to take her as they found her.

She now hastened towards the pair, carrying a dish on which were two tiny glasses of jelly.

“My dear boy,” she said, laying a caressing hand on Philip’s arm, and inspecting him as a physician might do, “you have excited yourself too much. I shall have to lock up that chess-board.”

“On the contrary, a little excitement is good for my patient,” Nadine said, coldly and with decision.

“You have not known him since he was a baby.”

“If no medical opinion was worth having without such experience, not one person in twenty thousand would stand a chance of being

cured," Nadine again replied, drily and firmly.

That thrust was not to be parried, so Mrs. Harpfield feigned not to hear.

"See what I have brought you," she said, placing one of the jelly glasses on Philip's plate, much as if he were a tiny glutton in the nursery

"Jelly is good for him, too," Nadine observed, glancing with a look of inexpressible contempt at the shabbily furnished supper-tray.

"You have only to complain if the cook sends up what you do not like," Mrs. Harpfield retorted, in a voice as unsympathetic as Nadine's.

"Thank you; the simpler plan will be for me to order Philip's meals beforehand from day to day."

"As you please," was the reply, the tones of both speakers gradually indicating the bitter warfare underlying outward civility. How could it be otherwise? The one so worldly, so materialistic; the other so earnest about things of weightiest import; and between the pair—gage of the battle—stood the welfare of a helpless lad. For both claimed this fragile chess-player, this would-be mathematician; but on what different grounds? In the eyes of the egotist, the sensualist, the boy's frail existence was precious for its money's worth; to the ardent young student and lover

of humanity, its preciousness consisted in the fact that it was simply a life. Who would prove the winner in the game?

"Well, I must go and look after my people. Good night, my precious child; good night, Mademoiselle Nadine."

And with that the gorgeous figure in crimson satin and lace, hastened back to the ball-room.

CHAPTER II.

A DEPARTURE IN BALL-GIVING.

THE ball-room animated with two or three score dancers, looked very much like any other. If the rules of etiquette in force there had been gathered from sixpenny manuals or learned by imitation, they certainly had much in common with social usages in high places. True, the cavaliers, with one or two exceptions, were not attired in swallow-tail coats, nor were their partners dressed up to Mrs. Harpfield's standard. There was a little uproarious laughter here and there, and occasionally the mistress of the ceremonies had to frown down a style of dancing in vogue at cheap quadrille parties. On the whole, the throng was a wonderfully good imitation of what it pretended to be—an

assemblage of ladies and gentlemen met together for elegant recreation. Among the guests were a few as irreproachable in manners and appearance as Mrs. Harpfield herself; footmen who might perhaps have passed muster for their masters at dinner; abigails who might have put on their mistress's Court dress and not blundered at the Drawing-room. The rest, knowing that future invitations depended on good behaviour, kept an eye on their betters and followed them in the minutest particular. An imitation, no matter how admirable, cannot be the genuine article, and all present envied the pair of guests who wore swallow-tail coats because they had come to a ball, and showed that easy assurance not to be learned from primers of good manners. These two men were all the while aping their neighbours, as assiduously trying to be quite free and easy in a society almost new to them. May it not, indeed, be more difficult, nowadays, for the lord to mimic his valet, than for the valet to counterfeit his master? The drawing-room and its doings are open to inspection all day long, but who may boldly penetrate into his own kitchen? Each employer of half a score of domestics plays on a miniature scale the part of autocrat. In reality he can no more know what is going on around him than the Czar of Russia.

The first of these guests, marked from the rest by the swallow-tail coat, was a handsome,

battered-looking man, with snow-white hair, regular features, and sunburnt complexion. His face recalled some half-effaced portrait of a Roman coin ; what remained of good looks sufficiently indicated how much was lost.

It was a physiognomy that all who saw might read. This easy-going, polished, elderly gentleman, ready to take his pleasure amid butlers and ladies'-maids, had seen as much of life as any one could well do. The threescore and odd years had been sucked like an orange to the last drop. He now presented that edifying spectacle, the out-and-out vagabond turned churchgoer and social pattern ; the irregularities and recklessness of a lifetime atoned for—in his own eyes, at least—by correct behaviour and attendance at church.

Mr. Adolphus Greenbank was not, perhaps, inappropriately named. Might not that cognomen so suggestive of flowers and summer-time, be taken as symbolic of his own career, at one time a tangle of thorns, stinging-nettles, and poisonous berries, at another, neat and trim, and pleasant to the eye of all ? On one finger he wore a magnificent diamond ring, the constant friend of a lifetime. Pawned in almost every capital of Europe, often separated from its owner by continents and even oceans, the ring had ever found its way back. Everything else in the shape of property had slipped through his grasp ; but for the scant savings of his parents, whose hearts

he had well-nigh broken, he would have been a pauper now. He was familiar with every vicissitude of fortune, from Court dinners to casual wards, yet he had contrived to preserve his ring. As he flashed it through his silvery hair, he might well feel proud of the achievement. For is not the terrible condition of society due to one small weakness of human nature, its inability to retain? Men and women are starving by hundreds and thousands around us, not because they never possessed anything at all, but because they could not keep what they had got. To teach people how to acquire is easy enough, the not letting go is a wholly different matter. On the whole, perhaps, Mr. Greenbank had a right to that easy, benevolent smile of his. It is the returned prodigal who edifies the world, not the pattern son who always did as he was told.

The second wearer of the swallow-tails was a young man, evidently with his way to make in the world. The courter of fortune is always on the look-out for opportunities. He can never tell who may or may not be useful to him, and can afford to neglect nobody. It is always possible, therefore, to point him out in a crowd. The quick, wandering glance, the alert ear, the perpetual expectancy, betray those who hope to turn even a social entertainment to good account.

Mr. Francis Winn was neither taller, better-

looking, nor, perhaps, cleverer than most of the men present. A certain amount of good looks and a presentable, if not fine physique, are indeed indispensable in the wearers of livery. Ugliness is carefully eliminated from the calling of footmen as well as the kindred one of parlour-maid. But although Mr. Winn had no especial personal attractions, he appeared to Mrs. Harpfield a being of wholly superior kind. In her eyes he seemed royal and inimitable, simply because he was what is called a gentleman. Whilst he now danced, flirted, and made merry with this pretty maid and that, she followed his movements. Wherever he went that terribly inquisitorial glance contrived to reach him. If he asked her hand in the dance or lingered by her side, her eyes brightened, her cheek flushed with the ardour of a girl in love. That expression of uncontested authority and overweening self-confidence, so marked in the company of Nadine and Philip, had vanished as she re-entered the ball-room. No sooner was she once more among the dancers than anxiety clouded her brow. She played the part of queen of the salon, mistress of the ceremonies, to perfection ; but there was an occasional uncertainty, a hesitation, a doubting in self. She had evidently here found a critic, a mirror in which she saw herself through the medium of another's appraisal.

Winn, for his part, had his restless moments also; whilst all assiduity and devotion to his hostess, he yet contrived to see what was going on in other parts of the room; nothing escaped that sharp, far-reaching eye of his; and as the evening wore on, he could hardly conceal a look of disappointment.

"Are all your guests here?" he asked of her with studied carelessness, as they walked through a quadrille.

"Certainly. Why do you ask?"

"Perhaps because I was dreading a crush in the supper-room; no disenchantment more painful than a ball-room supper you cannot so much as get within sight of. By the way, how is the poor boy?"

"As usual," Mrs. Harpfield replied, bluntly. She never encouraged valedictory questions concerning her charge.

"If I can be of use to him at any time, pray command me. He might like a sail on the river when the weather improves."

"We will see, thank you," was the curt rejoinder.

"What does he care for? He must have some tastes?" asked Winn.

Mrs. Harpfield laughed ironically.

"You forget that the poor child has had epileptic fits from the cradle!"

Winn had a retort on his lips, but, seeing the humour she was in, withheld

it. When the dance was over, he went in search of his fellow-wearer of the swallow-tail.

The two men chatted in a bay-window, whilst the dancers whirled round to the music of a waltz.

"Do tell me," asked Winn—"you are, I believe, initiated in the ways of this strange household—who is the handsome girl to be seen out of doors with little Philip?"

Mr. Greenbank shrugged his shoulders.

"I have sounded our charming hostess on the subject in vain. A governess, most likely; perhaps some foreigner, picked up on the late journey to Boulogne."

Mrs. Harpfield just then could be seen resting from the dance at the further end of the room.

The pair surveyed the rollicking, somewhat noisy scene with smiling cynicism.

"Do you like this sort of thing?" asked Winn, with an air of superiority. "Because, if you do, I don't."

"My dear fellow," rejoined the elder, "it is my duty to countenance these innocent social entertainments."

"Innocent!" sneered Winn. "Who pays for them? That is the question."

"The most dangerous question any human being can ask—'Who pays?' Once become inquisitive on that score, and enjoyment is gone for ever; we have then thrown in our lot

with the saints and martyrs, and must expect St. Laurence's gridiron."

"I am here," said Winn, "because I have my way to make in the world, and Mrs. Harpfield is a client. I am planning alterations for her. But why you should be here, I don't understand?"

"My motives are disinterested. I have not a favour to ask of any human being, thank Heaven!" replied the other. "It behoves me, therefore, to be of use in the world, and there are many ways of doing that. To-night, for instance, I hold aloof from the festivities, but all the while quietly exert a moral influence."

Winn laughed somewhat disrespectfully.

"I assure you I am not joking. Look around you; how decorous, how free from vulgarity is all this! A trifle noisy, perhaps, for sensitive ears, yet strictly within the limits of propriety. Now, I flatter myself that my presence counts for something."

"I honestly confess I should relish the whole thing if it were more genuine; if, for instance, a game of forfeits were proposed, and I might kiss Fanny, the pretty housemaid; but, to tell you plain truth, I came more in the hope of seeing that foreign governess than from any other motive."

"I am thankful to say one pretty girl is precisely as interesting or uninteresting to me as another. I hope, when you are as old as I am, you will have reached a similar frame of

mind. As to the governess, well, you see," here Mr. Greenbank looked cautiously around, "a woman may endure rivals who outshine her in one particular,—but when the rival is not only young and handsome, but more than a match in wit and understanding!—ah! you understand me, I am sure. I feel that, in Mrs. Harpfield's case, I also should turn the key on the schoolroom door to-night."

"I will sound that admirable Mr. Don, the cook; he is the very soul of good-nature."

"As well as being a cook one would walk miles on a winter evening to do justice to. You won't get anything out of him, however, regarding this mystery. Don't expect it."

Winn sauntered towards the portly figure in question with a would-be purposeless air.

"Good evening, Mr. Don," he said, with a hearty shake of the hand, "you are, I see, a devotee of the dance."

"I dance to live," was the rejoinder; Mr. Don being as quick at repartee as at making an omelette. "Instead of sighing like Hamlet, 'Oh! that these too fat sides would melt,' I dance in season and out of season, that is to say whenever I can get a pretty pair of shoes to keep mine company. My profession, Mr. Winn, and myself are at loggerheads. I am all lightness and airiness, and would fain swing like a fairy on a tree-top all day long. Instead, I am obliged to stand or move at a snail's pace, till the wonder

is I am not stiff and motionless as Lot's wife. It is the dance that saves me."

"You have a pleasant time of it here," Winn said, tentatively.

"The word pleasant has many meanings," was the dry answer; "if I were younger I should sigh over wasted time. Having nothing to learn, I can resign myself to a kind of semi-retirement."

"And your young——" Winn hesitated to use the offensive word "master," and, besides, he really hardly knew how far Philip Summerhill was here master, "and your young gentleman?" he asked. "Do you see much of him?"

"Bless him, yes," Mr. Don replied, with a kind of implied affectionateness. "He is a mere baby still, and we often have a toffee-making together."

"He has a governess now, has he not?"

"Ah, Mr. Winn, the poor little fellow will never know the misery of learning anything. He will quit the world as he entered it—his back innocent of the schoolmaster's rod. What happier lot could you wish him? Why should we ever be forced to learn? Knowledge comes quick enough of itself. It is my belief that half the crimes and misery in the world are due to this custom of birching human beings into talking parrots."

"Wise words! But do you mean to say that the poor boy is an idiot?"

"We are all idiots more or less. I should be sorry to say who is or who isn't," was the enigmatic answer.

"Then you think the foreign-looking lady I have lately seen with Philip is not a governess, perhaps a nurse?"

"Mr. Winn," said the man of the world, "my profession has nothing to do with sex. I cook alike for the delicate little appetites of women and our coarser needs; but beyond cooking for them—and dancing with them—I hold aloof from the sweet temptresses. I am, indeed, as indifferent to all as Diogenes in his tub, and ask no questions."

"You say that, with Fanny Farthing under the same roof?"

"Fanny Farthing is a sprite, a little witch. Look at her," Mr. Don said; "she understands the art of flirting with a roomful of admirers at a time. I prefer butterflies when dried and pinned to paper in a glass case."

Winn watched the glancing figure of Fanny, wondering on what principle Mrs. Harpfield could lock up a handsome governess and leave this elf-like creature free. But for her hands, coarse with toil, now nicely gloved, and for occasional slips of grammar, could any specimen of womankind be more distracting? Why should there be such strict lines of demarcation between the beauties that reign supreme in drawing-rooms

and servants' halls? he asked. White-robed, flower-becrowned, dancing, flitting, teasing Fanny, was about as bewitching a ball-room belle as a girl could well be. There was hardly vulgarity about her, only a certain airy unconcern and outspokenness not accepted in polite society. Winn, reflecting that his hostess would naturally accept Mr. Greenbank's escort to the supper-table, contrived to intercept Fanny as she passed out of the room.

"I won't taste a morsel of supper unless you let me sit beside you, Fanny," he said, "I won't, indeed."

"Then there will be all the more left for the rest of us," was the retort. "As for me, I must be drawn lots for, having promised myself to half-a-dozen supper partners already."

"Little flirt, are you not ashamed to confess such a thing?"

"Ashamed of being a flirt?" cried Fanny. "Were it not for the women who flirt, the world would commit suicide to-morrow. The only thing I was born for was to flirt, and some women can't even do that. But come and have a peep at the tables."

The pair crossed the corridor and glanced through the half-open doors of the supper-room. Had the magnates of the place been invited—the titled folk, the squiredom, the clerical hierarchy, even royalty itself—pre-

parations could hardly have been on a more lavish or elegant scale. Two long tables blazing with wax lights, reached from end to end of the spacious room; crystal, plate, and delicate hothouse greenery framing in three bands of gorgeous colour. Which was most dazzling it were hard to say, the flowers, the coloured glass, or the cates. Ruby-coloured jellies, creams just tinted with daintiest coral pink, gold-brown pasties, above which flashed the plumage of the pheasant, rather excited the imagination than the appetite; next came tiny artificial parterres—as indeed they must be described—of brilliant exotics, camellias, azaleas, cactus; whilst conspicuous above all, shone Venetian glass, roseate amber, lapis-lazuli, and sky-blue—so many gems, as it seemed, formed into fairy-like drinking vessels. It was a feast alike to look at and to relish after Epicurean fashion. Winn looked and looked again, finally gave a highly expressive “Whew!”

“You mean that it costs a pretty penny,” laughed Fanny.

He turned from the supper-table to his companion, hesitatingly. His looks said—Shall I here get at the truth; this sparkling, laughing, fay-like, apparently soulless creature, can she be a dark plotter with the rest?

“Who pays?” he asked, in a low, cautious voice.

Fanny’s face grew Sphinx-like in a moment.

Mr. Don himself had not looked more uncommunicative. Winn realised that he was to learn nothing from any one in Mrs. Harpfield's confidence.

"Who pays? Neither you nor I; that is one thing certain," retorted Fanny. "But is it not a lovely supper; enough to make one wish one had nothing else to do in life but eat suppers?"

"And steal a kiss from a pretty girl?" edged in Winn, wondering whether Fanny would forgive him if he suited the action to the word. It was very difficult to know precisely how to behave under such circumstances. Sixpenny etiquette doubtless forbids kissing; but are not such rules of conduct to be read between the lines? Fanny turned upon him with a sharp but smiling reproof. The flower in her dress had become unfastened, and she was readjusting it, pin in mouth, after the incorrigible habit of ladies'-maids and milliners. With that pin held between her pretty lips, she frowned at him now, looking more distracting than ever. He would have a kiss, his looks said, but first that terrible pin must be got rid of. In the midst of the little scene, Winn all expectancy, Fanny all coquettishness and playful menace, Mrs. Harpfield suddenly appeared. So quickly and noiselessly had she come, that she was there before they had an inkling of her presence.

"Fanny," she said, with the unmistakable air of the mistress who has once been maid, "it is your turn to wait to-night, remember. Go at once and change your dress."

Quick as lightning Fanny was gone, and the hostess, with a charming smile, now took her guest's arm. It was evident that she had conned her manuals of etiquette to some purpose.

"Mr. Greenbank is quite at home here, but this is your first visit; your place to-night must be by me at the head of the table."

"You do me too much honour," Winn stammered forth. That fairy-like supper-table had, however, now lost its charms, and, but for interested motives, he felt too much out of temper to be civil to Mrs. Harpfield at all. What right had she thus roughly to dismiss pretty Fanny?

He was poor, she had evidently ample wealth at her disposal; he felt constrained to hide his feelings. Truth to tell, he felt strangely out of place and ill at ease. The banquet was choice, the company agreeable, the most flattering attention was paid to himself. But one question would make itself heard, and spoiled his enjoyment:

"Who pays?" he thought, as he glanced round the elaborately furnished table. "Who pays?"

CHAPTER III.

RETRIBUTION IN THE DOORWAY.

Books of etiquette and manuals of good manners may stand the neophyte in good stead, so long as the head is cool and the lights are subdued. Under the influence of champagne and blazing chandeliers, when voices buzz and spirits rise to ebullition point, when the roses pinned to ball-dresses fade, and the cheeks of the wearer seem to have stolen their colour, it cannot be expected that such artificial maxims are listened to.

In spite of Mrs. Harpfield's Argus-eyed censorship, and Mr. Greenbank's silently exercised moral influence, the supper party became somewhat uproarious as the hours wore on. The iron discipline of the mistress was not relaxed for a moment, her frowns and gestures of disapproval were ready, but strictly as she might keep watch over her own household, she could not so easily check the exuberant mirth of her guests.

Without Mr. Don she might have been put to the blush in Winn's presence; what Greenbank thought of her entertainments was a matter of utter indifference to her; with Winn, the case was wholly different.

Gratefully she saw Mr. Don smile away

one little solecism after another, and with thankful ears she caught his mellow accents as he diverted the conversation from dangerous channels. The cook was here inimitable. He was no less dexterous with his tongue than his fingers, none nimbler in turning out an omelette, none happier in getting rid of an embarrassment. He was always stone deaf to anything he did not wish to hear, and would gravely suppose the others to be equally so.

On the whole, however, the mirth and uproariousness were innocent enough, even if somewhat offensive to good manners. If a kiss were slyly stolen behind some outspread fan, or if a too naïve compliment were resented by a box on the ear, surely these were bagatelles even the severest critic could overlook? A certain undignified jerkiness, too, and inability to sit bolt upright in one's chair, was perhaps equally pardonable, also an overweening garrulity and affectionateness. Hands were clasped, eternal friendships sworn, the most desperate vows exchanged, and all to be forgotten on the morrow. Once or twice the refrain of a popular song was begun by one of the roysterers. Mr. Don humoured the impulse by joining in to the extent of a verse or two, then, as if suddenly recollecting himself, his own rich tenor ceased, and the hint was taken that singing was out of place.

As the scene grew more and more uproarious, no one noticed an apparition in the doorway, the slight figure of a girl in a sober-coloured gown with braids of golden hair. Mrs. Harpfield and Mr. Don had too much on their hands to neglect the company. Greenbank was giving himself up to the pleasures of the table, at the same time taking care to keep strictly within the limits of good breeding. Winn, wonderful as it seemed to himself, was paying pretty compliments to a woman many years older than himself, whilst nothing short of an earthquake would have disturbed the assembled guests. Even Fanny, having waited on the rest, was now enjoying the champagne and the supper as hilariously as any. Too lazy to put on her discarded ball-dress, she looked perhaps all the prettier by virtue of contrast with the rest, her pink cotton gown, white muslin apron and mob cap, conspicuous for simplicity amid the finery of the others. There was no one to notice Nadine's appearance, nor did she seem to shun observation.

Why should she not stand by and look on? Who had the right to forbid her presence here?

As the girl watched the strange scene, her expression changed from amused surprise to deep indignation. At first sight everything had diverted her extremely. Nadine's knowledge of English country life was of a few weeks'

standing, no more. Although versed in human affairs beyond most women of her age, she had no experience whatever of the class with which she was now brought into contact. And vehement as was the feeling called forth by the spectacle before her, these merry-makers were not uninteresting, much less contemptible in themselves. Men cooks and women scullions surely called for sympathy as much as savants and great ladies. She liked to see people trying to rise in the social scale, aspiring after what they considered a worthier standard of life than their own. It was the want of heart, of principle in this parody of fashionable society, that repelled and exasperated her. These exotics in profusion, this champagne poured out so lavishly, the costly meats, were taken as matters of course, whilst the young owner of all, the real head of the house, was stinted of bare necessities. And if that were all! If indignity only were heaped upon him! If a scantily furnished board, and bodily needs grudgingly supplied, were the only wrongs Philip Summerhill endured so uncomplainingly!

Meantime the banquet grew livelier and noisier. Mr. Don looked from the champagne bottle to Mrs. Harpfield and shook his head meaningly; Mr. Greenbank leaned forward and whispered insinuating little words of

deprecation in her ear. Winn's compliments came in a manner astonishing to himself. The hostess felt compelled to let things take their course, and for once shut her eyes to small indiscretions. Genteel life, it was evident, could not be imitated to a nicety in a day. Many of her guests she could answer for, but a considerable number of supernumeraries—those invited to make up the necessary number—were novices in the art of etiquette, and hardly able, perhaps, to do more than spell out a sentence in sixpenny manuals. A shop-assistant was expected to behave like a gentleman, but from under-gardeners and stablemen much surely must be excused.

"Come," cried one of the dancers, a good-looking, well-dressed young man, called upon state occasions Mr. Pakeman, but in the work-a-day world, Tommy, a useful outdoor man in Mrs. Harpfield's establishment — "come, Mr. Don, what are we wasting so much time for? Out with a song, old chap; a song that will please the girls."

"Mr. Pakeman!" remonstrated the mistress from the head of the table. Under ordinary circumstances Tommy was as submissive to his mistress as if he were five years old; but to-night even the frown of reproof failed of effect.

"For once in a way, ma'am!" Thus everybody in the household addressed Mrs.

Harpfield. "Just for once in a way. I'm sure no one wants any more jigging to-night; leastways, if their legs ache like mine. I'm as sweated as if I'd been getting in hay before a thunderstorm——"

"Tommy!" broke in Mrs. Harpfield's everyday voice. The offender was no longer a ball-room guest, but a subordinate called to account by his mistress. But Tommy was not cowed, even then.

"I'm Tommy, ma'am, I know that well enough; but poor Tommy has legs, and Mr. Pakeman may wish to do his best; he won't get any more dancing out of them to-night. Let us sit still, I say, and have a song."

"I propose a toast instead," put in Mr. Don, looking reassuringly at Mrs. Harpfield. He wanted to treat the matter as a joke, and thus adroitly hit upon a compliment. "A toast, then, before adjourning to the ball-room. We will drink to the health of our generous hostess and most hospitable entertainer."

A happier turn could not have been given to affairs. The proposition was responded to vociferously; all were on their feet in a moment. The art of health-drinking had not yet, however, been mastered from the manuals of etiquette. Not satisfied with chinking Mrs. Harpfield's glass, the men must shake hands with her, the feminine

portion of the party kiss her on the cheek. There was no checking the wild impulse, one rushed forward after another; her hand was not only shaken, but ran a risk of dislocation from the over cordiality of her admirers. The women kissed her, once, twice, three times, as if, indeed, they would never leave off. This effervescence of gratitude indicated real feeling. All present regarded their employer or hostess as a benefactress. A hard taskmistress she might be; for all that, her service was an enviable one. Never were toil and obsequiousness more lavishly rewarded with pleasures and privileges.

Mrs. Harpfield positively blushed as she now listened to compliments and laudations on every side. The sudden turn affairs had taken, calmed the most untractable, sobered the liveliest; excitement was diverted into a safe channel. Some laughed, some wept, all uttered ejaculations of sentiment, and all got rid of their emotion.

"Is she not a darling?" cried Fanny, quite forgiving the check she had received an hour or two before.

"If only there were a few more like her!" put in Tommy, wiping a penitent tear from his eye. "She may kick me downstairs to-day, I'll go on all-fours to please her to-morrow."

"And how she treats us all," said a third speaker, a young man wearing livery, but

not in Mrs. Harpfield's employ. "We might be lords and dukes, judging from what goes down our throats."

"Ay," added a fourth, a prettily dressed, ladylike girl, deeply imbued with Socialistic ideas, "you are right, Mr. Richards, Mrs. Harpfield treats folks as the Scripture teaches. She's a Christian, if any ever lived out of the Acts of the Apostles."

"And permit me to say it in all sincerity," Mr. Greenbank said, in his mellow, silvery tones, turning to Mrs. Harpfield, "a most thoughtful and charming hostess, one who naturally, and to the manner born, fulfils the time-honoured rites of hospitality."

Then Winn taking her hand, bent low over it, and murmured something apparently to the same purpose.

That little act, gracefully performed and of a kind novel in the eyes of most present, was the signal for an outburst. One of the guests on the spur of the moment unguardedly cried out: "Three cheers for Mrs. Harpfield." The watchword was vociferously caught up, and now not only the supper-room but the whole house rang with deafening shouts which not even Mr. Don could moderate.

An uninitiated spectator of the scene must have supposed all the social and moral virtues to be represented in the person thus apostrophised. Here was surely not a mere Lady Bountiful, but a ministrant alike to the

spiritual and bodily needs of her poorer neighbours, some angel in woman's shape only receiving the meed of praise that was her due!

Thus regarded, the ovation might awaken sympathy, and the pleasant feeling that, after all, human nature is not so envious or so narrow as we are led to believe; merit is recognised, praise is accorded, and fraternal spirit prevails generally in spite of the pessimists.

To the slender, dark-robed critic in the doorway, the demonstration wore a wholly different aspect; but none noticed her presence, none were as yet awed by the gathering scorn, the rebellious protestation, the hardly reined-in contempt and abhorrence written on that expressive face.

In Nadine's eyes the spectacle was no longer comic and diverting. She seemed to gaze on saturnalia, shocking alike to the taste and the moral sense.

The really innocent part of the proceedings, the Babel of voices, the scrambling of overgrateful guests to get near their hostess, the delight with which one forestalled another in this business of kissing and hand-shaking, filled her with loathing and repugnance. She could hardly look on and hold her peace.

On a sudden, as Mrs. Harpfield turned blushing from one flattering cavalier to another, she started, as if instinctively made

aware of a hostile presence. For a second, composure failed her, she seemed staggered, paralysed with fear. Are we thus influenced by the agency of hostile will before speech and recognition reach us? Had Nadine's secret indignation made itself felt before the other met her scathing glance? Certain it is that Mrs. Harpfield became self-conscious and agitated before looking towards the doorway. Whilst Nadine met the recognition with cold impassibility, to her it came as an evil omen, a sign, not to be misread, of trouble and contest, maybe of doom hidden in the dim future. Hitherto she had lived from day to day without the eye of conscience upon her. She felt it now, and quailed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DUEL BEGINS.

NADINE NORLOFF'S acquaintance with Mary Ann Harpfield and Philip Summerhill was of a few months' standing only. The lad had fallen ill at Boulogne. Nadine, who happened to be staying in the same boarding-house, attended him, and with such success, that his guardian begged her to accompany the party home. So keen was the interest felt by the young physician in her patient, so

clingingly devoted had he become, that after some hesitation she consented. She had just finished an arduous course of study, and much needed an interval of mental and bodily repose; the prospect of a quiet country life in England was very enticing. Philip's case, moreover, was one bearing upon her especial line of medical study. In watching over him, curing him as she hoped to do, she should practically illustrate her original theories on a dark and difficult subject. When she became more familiar with this incongruous household, when she began to suspect the deep-laid schemes of which he was to be victim, all other desires and motives were merged in one. She must, she would rescue him. The hapless boy should attain health, freedom, the only kind of life which is life indeed, through her means. Hitherto his education, to use Mrs. Harpfield's words, had been in her own hands, but it was not till they returned home that Nadine learned what that education meant. The school-room, ironically called, was little more than a nursery. Philip's library consisted of half-a-dozen books, such as Mrs. Markham's *England*, Mangnall's *Questions*, besides a few bound volumes of children's magazines, adapted to the capacity of five-year-old readers. Lessons over, he was amused with toys and games equally juvenile, drawing on a slate, toffee-making with Mr. Don in

the kitchen, his bit of garden, pet rabbits, and the like. Anything in the shape of athletic sports or intellectual exercise was strictly forbidden. He must not tire himself, he must not make his head ache with thinking; in other words, health was to be purchased at the expense of semi-idiotcy.

Nadine began her reformation in the gentlest fashion. She read of stirring adventure and marvellous deed, of natural wonders and the mysteries of science. She put captivating works of travel and history in his way, took him to the local museum near to inspect the cases of birds and insects; talked of foreign countries and the strange things she had herself seen. Then, finding him listless and incurious, she tried to discover if he had any artistic instincts, any faculty for music or painting. Here also she met with no response. On the side of pure enjoyment she found him as painfully undemonstrative. He seemed to desire nothing, to crave nothing, hardly to possess a will. Could she only rouse the sense of volition, she felt that the rest of her task would be comparatively easy. What was her astonishment and delight, then, to find one keen purpose at last alert, one dormant power suddenly awakened? This passionate leaning towards mathematical science was, in her eyes, of the happiest

augury for Philip's future. Could she only foster and develop his talent, she saw here not only the means of his own personal regeneration, but of ultimate delivery. None would dare to pronounce a successful mathematical candidate an imbecile.

Nadine had not in the first instance proposed to take Philip's education out of his nurse's hands. She wanted every moment of these deliciously long, quiet mornings to herself. All that she had originally undertaken was the supervision of the lad's health; but she was a concentrated thinker, and could work with Philip sitting by. It was no hindrance to thought to have him in the same room, quietly turning over the pages of a book, or amusing himself with the interminable games of patience Mrs. Harpfield had taught him.

So by little and little, and under one pretext and another, she had contrived to get the schoolroom to herself, modifying Philip's inner life as best she could without arousing suspicion. It was odious to her thus to plot and connive, but she was a physiognomist, quick to read character; from the first moment she knew with whom she had to deal. A perfectly ingenuous nature cannot be a match for wile and crookedness. The acutest intellect may be foiled by vulgar cunning.

"After last night's carouse, Mrs. Harpfield

will be sleepy this morning," Nadine thought next day; "Philip shall have a thoroughly good mathematical lesson before the enemy is stirring."

She had reckoned without her host. They were both delightfully absorbed in their work—what condition, indeed, so delightful as complete mental absorption?—when quite noiselessly Mrs. Harpfield entered. The pair were far too intent upon their problem to notice that soft opening of the door, and for several seconds she watched them with gathering frown. Not wishing to startle Philip, she unclosed the door stealthily as before, and this time heralded her coming by a loud clearing of the throat. Without a word of greeting she went straight up to the table, and, smiling reproof, in the gentlest manner, drew away book and papers.

"Stooping over books again," she said, caressing him fondly as she spoke. "Oh, Philip, Philip, must I ever be watching over you? Run downstairs to the kitchen and see what they are doing there."

Philip's face clouded, but he made no attempt at resistance. To Nadine's astonishment, he did not even appeal to her; the habit of compliance had made him automatic.

No sooner was he gone than Mrs. Harpfield turned to Nadine with the authoritative manner habitual to her.

"Mademoiselle Nadine," she began, aggressively, "let me say to you, for once and for all, that I cannot have Philip's brain overtaxed. These studies must be discontinued."

"You have placed the boy under my care," Nadine answered, drily and decisively. "A physician has the right to prescribe for body as well as mind."

"That depends upon circumstances. Philip is a child, unable to act for himself. I am the proper person to consult regarding his welfare."

"Let me put one question, one short, simple question to you, Mrs. Harpfield. Do you, or do you not, wish Philip to grow up into a man, in the full possession of his faculties, an intelligent, responsible being?"

"As if I wished anything else!" was the reply flung at Nadine like a missile. "Of what good to make him learned at the expense of health? I want the poor lad to live."

Nadine looked at her antagonist searchingly.

"Is Philip's present existence to be called life? Were he a child of my own, a thousand times rather would I see him in his grave than condemned to such a fate. I am bound to speak the truth to you, Mrs. Harpfield. A few years more of such repression and he will become an idiot, whereas, he only

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requires to be treated like a rational, responsible being to become one. He has excellent capacities. These physical weaknesses may, under proper treatment, be wholly outgrown; but the cure is not to be found in enforced idleness and inertia. His mental faculties must be developed. In his case, intellectual exertion will help to bring about bodily strength."

"You are a doctor and are bound to theorise," Mrs. Harpfield retorted, as scornful as Nadine herself. "There are many things we simple, unlearned folks can learn by experience, and one is, that a poor epileptic lad cannot be treated as if he were in health. You see what Philip is, a perfect baby in most things. Till the other day he could not write his name."

Nadine's face said: "And whose fault was that?" She controlled herself for the lad's sake, and went on calmly.

"Pardon me," she said, "a diagnosis is based upon facts, not theories. Philip's case is but one of a large number of similar ones I have personally watched and studied. You, yourself, have already admitted my successful treatment of more than one crisis."

"You are at perfect liberty to exercise your judgment where his health is concerned; his education I cannot, I will not, have interfered with."

Nadine reflected for a moment. She

thought of Philip's dependance upon herself, of the future and what it must be to him if she accepted these conditions. In a moment the mental weighing had to take place. In the first scale she put his present happiness—a brief spell of mere ephemeral, superficial contentment; in the other, the chances of his total recovery—chances they were only. She recognised all that she should have to fight against if she continued this struggle. Yet was it not worth while to enter upon the contest? It was something more than a life, an existence in her hands; it was the life, the existence of a soul.

There are some natures that arouse a very demon of antagonism in the calmest, and Mrs. Harpfield's was one. Nadine felt irritated, nay, indignant with herself for allowing anger to get the uppermost; but it had reached the culminating point. She read this woman through and through, and could not keep back her scorn.

"Send me away, then," she cried; "deprive the poor boy of the only element of happiness in his life, and what will be your reward? He will die. You want him—for your own purpose—to live. Do you take me to be blind? Can I help seeing through your dark schemes? This lad is to be made an idiot of. The least inclination on his part to learn anything, to do anything manly, to think, act, and judge for himself, is checked.

His intellect has been stunted, his will paralysed, and of set purpose. Had he been properly treated, regarded as an intelligent human being, he would not now be the simple, helpless child he is. But he is only that. There is no deficiency about him; he only needs stimulus and encouragement to overtake other boys of his age, and grow up a man in the best sense of the word. A man you will never let him become. Better far, then, send me away, and break his heart now. I am ready to go to-morrow, if you will; but be warned by me—Philip will die.”

Mrs. Harpfield listened to this outburst without a word. More than once since the return home Nadine had offered gentle remonstrance on the subject of the boy's education. This was the first time she had openly reproached, much less accused her. Mrs. Harpfield, exasperated as she was, retained enough self-mastery to go also through a process of mental weighing. Nadine was altogether odious, nevertheless altogether precious to her. She hardly knew which she dreaded most, her presence or her departure. For that prognostication was no mere threat. Nadine's going would very likely break Philip's heart; the shock might, perhaps, kill him.

On the other hand, how would it be possible to live under the same roof with

her any longer; to be perpetually brought face to face with a hostile will, an implacable disapproval, a stern inquisition?

The girl was no mere vulgar adversary, to be cowed and set aside. She was rather a power to be humoured, conciliated, won over, if possible.

"You will be sorry for what you have said, when you give yourself time to reflect," she said, looking injured and aggrieved. "I do not want to send you away, but you must retract your words or go. Philip himself would be the first to resent such treatment of his guardian angel."

"Fiend," murmured Nadine, between her set teeth, when the door had closed upon her adversary.

CHAPTER V.

A VENTURE.

BUT an ingratiating, soft-voiced, altogether cosmopolitan and plausible fiend.

A few minutes later, Mrs. Harpfield was helping Philip to get ready for his party, as she called it, with the sweetest readiness and affability; no widowed mother of spoiled darling could apparently throw more heart and soul into his childish amuse-

ments. The remainder of the ball-room suppers was always generously made over to the young master of the house. Mr. Don, Fanny, Tommy, and the rest, were invited to partake, and loud would be the merriment over blind-man's buff, hunt the slipper, magic, music, and forfeits. Nadine from the first had openly objected to such entertainments. Why should not Philip have friends and associates of his own age? she urged. She had not as yet ventured to add—of his own rank. To her it was clear as daylight that this poor lad was gently born, but she could only unravel the mystery of his existence by one thread at a time. Mrs. Harpfield vouchsafed no explanation, and she felt that she should gain most by apparent indifference. The simple, down-right question—who is Philip Summerhill? would inevitably prove fatal to her plans. She should be sent away.

Whilst Mrs. Harpfield was petting Philip as if he were a five-year-old bantling, saying to herself with rage in her heart that she was more than a match for this high-handed young physician, and that she had only to give her mind to the matter, to undo Nadine's influence, Nadine also pondered and planned.

Two courses, and two only, seemed clear to her. She must either put Philip's cause in other hands or she must remain, foiling

Mrs. Harpfield with her own weapons, matching craft with craft, and wile with wile. An apology, a well-feigned submission to orders, Philip, by little and little, let into her plans, and all might be well. His mind would grow and his faculties develop in secret; before reaching man's estate he might be in a condition to assert his independence.

But such stratagem and underhand dealing were repellent to her. Moreover, much as she was interested in the boy, she felt unable to give up six years of her life to him. Philip was fifteen, he could not legally free himself from Mrs. Harpfield's sway till he was twenty-one. He would never attain his freedom if left to himself. And no help seemed near. She distrusted every member of the household, and what she had seen of outsiders inspired little confidence. She must find an ally as independent and disinterested as herself. After that long cogitation, Nadine put on her furs and set out for a walk. To her northern temperament this East Anglian landscape in mid-winter had inexpressible charms. A Suffolk village under snow does not sound idyllic, and the real lover of country life would hardly perhaps exchange the glowing loveliness of mid-summer for the weird monotony of December. Yet when the snow has fallen lightly and the bare elm-trees are delicately pencilled against

the pale blue heavens, we have rich compensation, we seem to realise the spirit rather than the form of this natural world.

Everywhere, indeed, Nature is as asleep, dead, and the calm of sleep and death touch us more than the fulness and richness of life. But not always! Only in moments of deep seriousness and passionate conflict may the unbroken calm of perpetual repose be better than the mingled exultation and sorrow of toiling in the sunshine.

There are certain wintry aspects that exhilarate, too. Is there any sight more beautiful than the hedge-thorn stripped of its leaves, showing myriads of scarlet berries? Perhaps all around is dull and neutral, the thorn lends brilliance and joyousness to the scene; whilst near, as if moved to sing by the sight of it, chirps some robin red-breast, of itself enough to keep care-laden souls from despair. Then the rosy flush of sunset on the leafless, flowerless world, is a pageant hardly outdone by summer's witchery; winter time is indeed one of the great shows of Nature, but solemn, grandiose, restful.

These flat, fallow fields, now whitened with snow, gave Nadine a home-like feeling. The frosty air braced her; as she walked on briskly she grew light-hearted and confident. Nothing really strengthens like such communion. We go to our friends for common sympathy and worldly wisdom. Only

Nature teaches us what we are in ourselves and our relation to the universal life of humanity.

In these rural districts, country houses are few and far between, and it was only after an hour of quick walking that she reached her destination, the residence of Sir Vernon Vernon, county magistrate and justice of the peace. It was a handsome place, a mansion of red brick, with an enormous number of front windows, as if the builder had thought the owners could not have too many opportunities of admiring their lovely little park. Although small in extent, it possessed some of the finest trees in this part of the country, timber as the odiously mercantile expression describes them, trees, like other beautiful things, being appraised according to their marketable value. No less fair to look at now than in leafy summer, was this forest in miniature, the bright pictures in water-colour exchanged for exquisite etching, every delicate line of branch and bough delineated in deep purply black on dazzling white ground. The only blotch of colour—that conspicuous enough—was the deep red façade of the mansion. No more appropriate symbol to be found of the traditional, jovial, rubicund English squire than his dwelling!

A well-bred butler is, perforce, a physiognomist, and Nadine was admitted at once.

Her rich Russian furs, perhaps, added distinction to the youthful figure and striking face, and a certain decision of manner at once proclaimed her position in society.

"I will take in your card, if you please," the man said. "Sir Vernon does not often receive visitors at this hour of the day."

"By all means," Nadine replied, producing a little silver case of quaint Russian pattern.

She had warmed herself for a few minutes by the blazing hall-fire, when the man returned.

"My master will see you," he replied, and straightway conducted her to a small, well-warmed study at the back of the house, its one small window looking on to a little brick-paved yard, in the centre of which was a pump. The sight of that pump, after the sylvan scenery she had just witnessed from the carriage-drive, struck Nadine with a strange sense of incongruousness. But is not Sir Vernon with his pump a type of the Englishman? Fine views and sunny rooms are kept for festival and for the world. The brick-paved yard and the pump do well enough for ourselves and for every day. Sir Vernon being old, childless, and a widower, preferred that warm, dismal little room, to any other part of the house.

The tall, upright figure standing on the hearthrug bowed brusquely, though not with-

out a certain old-fashioned politeness, and then the host eyed his guest. He looked from her to the card he held between his fingers, once, twice, three times.

"I was led to expect your — husband, maybe, father or brother; in other words, Doctor Nadine Norloff?" he said, courteously, yet hardly able to conceal his misgivings.

"I am Doctor Nadine Norloff," Nadine replied, with gentle hauteur.

Progressive ideas do not penetrate the county bench and society in country places with extreme rapidity. Sir Vernon, although possessed of liberal views generally, was old-fashioned, and lived amongst those who, advanced enough in matters of material concern, ready to adopt the last new sumptuary edict, and follow the latest innovation in dress and mode of living, remain half a century behind in all points requiring laborious reasoning out. A more conscientious man than Sir Vernon it were hard to find, but at seventy-five he might well be pardoned for setting aside many social and ethical problems.

There were, too, some pieces of doctrine he believed in as in Scripture itself, and one was this: a woman had no right to any title beyond those that rank or marriage could confer.

"Of what nationality?" he asked, in the same tones, half suspicious, half friendly. He

was evidently much struck by the appearance of his visitor, and at the same time he felt a little afraid of being carried away; in fact, of letting admiration get the better of prudence. Adventuresses could wear quite as engaging and ingenuous a look as this young woman doctor. But Sir Vernon possessed one weakness in common with our much revered Walter Scott. It made all the difference to him in the world—he could not help himself—whether a woman were good looking or no.

“Russian,” was the prompt reply.

“And you are a veritable M.D.?”

“I hold a French degree. I shall be pleased to show you my diploma if you wish it.”

“Not at all; not at all. I take you at your word. One question. Have these studies and foreign journeys been made with the approbation of your parents?”

“Alas! I am an orphan,” was the reply, with a pained, stricken look.

“Dear me, I am sorry to hear it. Now tell me your errand.”

“It is rather a long story——”

“Oh, dear, I hope not. Stories, true or false, written or spoken, good or bad, should always be short, the shorter the better. However, begin, go straight ahead and take short cuts.”

Nadine smiled. At last she felt that in

this cold, distant England, she had found a friend.

"You are doubtless aware that the tenant of Reedmere Hall is a certain Mrs. Harpfield?"

"Yes, and a very superior person, too, for her station of life, I hear. She was the trusty head-servant of her late employers—at least so I have heard—who made over to her the sole care of their only child, an idiot boy. But proceed."

Nadine winced.

"Last autumn I happened to be staying in the same hotel at Boulogne with Mrs. Harpfield. The boy fell ill, and I attended him. He interested me much for many reasons, and I consented to return with the party to England. I am under Mrs. Harpfield's roof now."

She stopped, overcome with emotion. The deep, silently-cherished indignation of months seemed as if it would overpower her. Tears rose to her eyes, her cheeks flushed crimson.

"She is a fit person, I hope, for a young lady like yourself to live with," began Sir Vernon, wholly misinterpreting her agitation. "You have nothing to complain of on the subject of propriety."

"Would matters were no worse!" was the passionate reply; "would that Mrs. Harpfield were her own enemy only! Sir Vernon, you are an English gentleman and

a magistrate. I appeal to your sense of justice, your humanity. A dastardly, an odious crime is being slowly committed, almost under your very eyes, in your own immediate neighbourhood."

"Good Heavens! The hussy doesn't beat and starve the poor little fellow, does she? She isn't slowly poisoning him in order to get rid of the charge?"

"Her guilt is of deeper dye still," Nadine continued, passionately as before. "There is much that is dark and mysterious about the boy's history. Two things, however, are as clear as daylight. It is in Mrs. Harpfield's interest to keep him alive; it is in her interest to drive him into idiocy."

Sir Vernon breathed a sigh of relief, and his attention seemed a shade less keen.

"How can you prove these assertions?" he asked.

"I have now been several months with Philip Summerhill. I assure you, Sir Vernon, he is no more of an imbecile than myself. He has been subject to epileptic fits, and Mrs. Harpfield makes this a pretext for treating him like a baby, dwarfing his faculties, depriving him of every mental and bodily stimulus. If such a state of things is allowed to continue till he is twenty-one, he will remain a tool in the hands of this woman, this fiend in human shape."

"You use strong words."

"Can any words be too strong when applied to such a machinator?" Nadine cried. "To be brutal, to murder, are surely crimes of lesser magnitude than thus slowly to destroy God's first, best, highest gift, human reason? As far as right and wrong are concerned, Mrs. Harpfield might as well consign the boy to an idiot asylum for life. The injury would be no greater."

"Are you not perhaps exaggerating matters," said Sir Vernon, soothingly; "allowing your feelings to get the better of your judgment? It is hardly likely that the lad's affairs are entirely in the hands of one person. He must have trustees and guardians who will in due time come forward and see to his interests. In the meantime, is he kindly treated?"

"That is the worst part of it. All these people—for everybody in the house is Mrs. Harpfield's blind agent—are kind to him, do nothing to arouse his dislike. Meantime they fatten upon his wealth, and have only one ambition, to keep him perpetually a minor."

"Bring the lad to see me one day," Sir Vernon said, after a pause.

A scornful, triumphant smile rose to Nadine's lips.

"You think Mrs. Harpfield would let him come! As well invite a prisoner from a Russian dungeon! When I tell you that his only associates are her accomplices, and

that his movements are strictly watched, you will see that I do not exaggerate. If I brought him to see you, it must be by stealth."

"We will wait a little. I should like to know more of the lad's parentage. Meantime, if, as you surmise, he is surrounded by conspirators and despoilers, how comes it about that they can sleep in their beds with one at hand so shrewd, I may say, so very deep as yourself?"

"Ah!" said Nadine, again smiling triumphantly, "if Mrs. Harpfield could get rid of me, she would be the happiest person under the sun, but for the present she dare not. The poor boy dotes on me."

"No wonder," murmured Sir Vernon, wholly forgetting that Nadine was that anomaly, a woman doctor, only mindful of her beauty, her generous ardour, her winningness.

"And for the present I have no wish to go. I want to assure myself that Philip Summerhill is not—figuratively speaking—to be shut up in a madhouse."

"Mind you don't let them shut you up in a madhouse, literally," Sir Vernon said. "If these people are as infamous as you represent them to be, they are capable of anything. You ought to be on your guard."

Nadine smiled away the caution.

"I have no fear. But what can I do; what can you do for the boy?"

"Nothing," was the prompt reply.

Nadine looked utterly crestfallen, and out of countenance. Sir Vernon resumed after a painful pause :

"Listen to an old man's advice, young lady. Had you come to me with the report that this child was being starved, beaten, or otherwise ill-used, the law could help you, no difficulty whatever about bringing the offender to justice then ! But what have you to urge against this woman ? Pure surmises only. You surmise that she wants him to grow up incapable of managing his own affairs. You surmise that he is heir to a large property of which she would thus have the handling. You have, it seems to me, no data to go upon, absolutely none whatever. We cannot interfere with our neighbour's affairs upon conjecture only. And the less, as a rule, we concern ourselves with other people's business the better."

"Would you have me leave the poor boy to his fate ?" Nadine asked, unable to conceal her indignation. This courteous, benevolent, high-principled gentleman, then, was as indifferent on the subject of abstract justice as Mrs. Harpfield's subordinates !

"Softly, softly. What I want to make you see is this : you can do no good, only harm, by interfering at the present stage of affairs. You must obtain a little more

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information, a few more hard facts, and, in a word, be more sure of your premisses. Have you a note-book in your pocket?"

Nadine produced a set of ivory tablets and a pencil.

"Ah! I see I have to do with a business-like person. Now write down the following questions: Is—please write down the boy's Christian and surname—Philip Summerhill—is that it?—an orphan, or are his parents living? Is Mrs. Harpfield—I think I have the name correctly—his legally constituted guardian acting alone or with others on his behalf? What was the Christian name of the boy's father, where did he live, and when did he die, if he is dead, as we suppose is the case? Having got at the facts we can get at the will, and something might be done. I am inclined, however, to believe that your interest in the child leads you to exaggerate matters. Perhaps there is more of ignorance than of malice in his bringing up. This good woman may conscientiously believe that her charge is of weak intellect, and unfit for study and the normal life of other boys."

Nadine rose to go in silent discouragement. She felt grateful to Sir Vernon for his kindly interest in her story, and his benevolent, almost fatherly behaviour; she felt, nevertheless, that Philip had no champion but herself.

"Let me give you another word or two of advice," added her host. "They may serve you in good stead at some future time. Never exasperate even your worst enemy. Never put anything down in writing, unless absolutely obliged. And, lastly, make up your mind that affairs will seldom turn out so desperate as you apprehend. In nine cases out of ten we magnify our misfortunes beforehand. And above all things, do not get yourself into trouble. Think twice, think twenty times, before getting yourself into trouble."

Nadine went away with despair in her heart. If such the counsel of the kindly and the just, what might she expect of worldlings and egotists? If Sir Vernon refused to help her, vainly should she appeal to Mrs. Harpfield's satellites. Irrespective of personal feeling, those last well-intentioned words of cut-and-dry wisdom could but pain her deeply. Did they not nicely indicate the accepted creeds of selfish, successful humanity; the safe, irrefutable arguments that have prevailed over heroic initiative from time immemorial? Let wrong get the upper hand, cruelty and injustice work their will, our first concern must be, not to get ourselves into trouble.

Nor was there much comfort to be derived from the fact that such men as Sir Vernon are the first to rejoice when a criminal is

brought to justice, a murderer is condemned to the gallows, a thief to prison. But the most crying evils are often those not amenable to prompt retribution. The worst foes of humanity are not always the malefactors whose misdeeds are patent to all. The sources of worst misery and cruelest wrong may lie deeper. And the world would remain improgressive, as during the glacial epoch, were there not a few brave souls ready at any moment to get themselves into trouble for the good of their kind.

CHAPTER VI.

FAUST AND MEPHISTOPHELES.

DESPITE this feeling of disenchantment, Nadine confessed that her errand had not been in vain. Much of Sir Vernon's advice was invaluable. She now saw a clear line of action before her. By some means or other she must obtain the fullest information concerning Philip's parentage and circumstances. She thought of Mrs. Harpfield's entourage, categorising every member. Could she trust the portly, self-sufficient, immeasurably good-natured cook, courier, man of business, Mr. Don? Or little butterfly Fanny Farthing, ever ready to oblige, ever forgetful of her

promises? Was the first to be flattered, the second to be bribed into a confidence? She recoiled from such subterfuges, but there seemed no chance of succeeding by open means. Then her thoughts reverted to outsiders. The two men so often seen at Reedmere Hall, and evidently belonging to a different class of society—Mrs. Harpfield's old friend, Mr. Greenbank, as she called him; and that rising young architect, as she described Francis Winn—had she better ground for trust here? Her heart misgave her.

Meantime the winter day had brightened wonderfully, and Nadine, anxious to enjoy the snow pageant as long as possible, took what she believed to be a roundabout road to Reedmere Hall. The sky was now bright as at midsummer, the sun as brilliant, only instead of green fields and flower-starred meadows, stretched everywhere the untarnished, scintillating, level snow; and though a wide landscape is hardly to be found in these regions, the glimpses of white plains farther on, seen through the bare boughs, lent an aspect of distance. Here and there in the middle of some vast cornfield stood a group of superb elm or oak trees, compensating for the lack of hills, forming objects no less conspicuous or beautiful. The scene was very solitary, not a labourer afield, no flocks or herds abroad, only about the

delicate lacework of the elm branches flitted the rooks, so welcome both to the eye and the ear in mid-winter, bringing home to the mind the fact that the life of Nature is robust and that there is an appropriateness in all her moods.

Lost in thought, Nadine did not observe that her road was leading away from home, when a pleasant, educated, gentlemanly voice arrested her. Turning her head, she saw Greenbank and Winn in sporting dress, with gun on shoulder, emerge from a field-path just opposite.

"Excuse the hint," Winn said, and, as he spoke, both men raised their hats. "This road will lead you far, very far from Reedmere, and you are doubtless returning thither. I believe I have seen you at the Hall with little Philip Summerhill."

"Thank you, yes, I am staying there. I have, then, missed my way?"

"We will put you in the right road," Greenbank said, readily, his tones, too, having a grateful sound in Nadine's ears. It was a rich, mellow voice, and, like his companion's, the voice of a well-bred man. She seemed to breathe more freely in such company after three months of the society of Mrs. Harpfield, Mr. Don, and Fanny. The scene of the night before was not forgotten, but all the odium of it seemed to belong to Philip's Harpie. These two had

been perhaps blinded to the true state of the case, made to regard her as she represented herself, the poor child's guardian angel. The three walked on in the crisp, exhilarating, truth-compelling air, as Nadine felt it; could any one wilfully pervert the truth amid such scenes? Whilst she was wondering how far she might trust their discretion or their honour by asking questions, they were casting about in their minds how most fittingly to satisfy their curiosity regarding herself.

Greenbank took the initiative. He was elderly, he was not paying court to the mistress of Reedmere Hall, he could afford to run the risk of offending her by making Nadine's acquaintance.

"I also have caught sight of you occasionally in that charming old garden, and have thought—pray excuse the inevitable reflection—how uncongenial, and how cut off from sympathy you must find such an existence."

"Although your pupil, your charge——" began Winn.

"My patient," put in Nadine.

"Pardon me, your patient is far more intelligent and companionable than one might suppose. But is it possible that the latest pioneer of civilisation, a lady physician, has in reality found her way to these benighted regions?"

Nadine bowed and smiled. There was

an openness and cordiality about him that won confidence; his smile was frank and pleasant, and the fellow feeling of youth drew them together. But for the remembrance of last night's scene—the glimpse of this manly speaker bowing low over Mrs. Harpfield's hand—she felt that they might become friends.

"Is the place really so behindhand?" she asked. "Yet I must believe that instructed people are few and far between, otherwise"—here she glanced searchingly at the pair—"you two would not accept the society of Reedmere Hall."

Winn blushed like a girl. Greenbank cleared his throat, and answered in soft, ingratiating tones:

"Let me explain our appearance at last night's festivity. Mrs. Harpfield is a philanthropist, and like all lords of her kind nowadays, is strongly tinctured with Socialism. Her dearest wish is to elevate her own class, that is to say, the class from which she has herself arisen, and to give to every member with whom she comes in contact the same advantages we of the better rank can freely indulge in. Music, song, the dance, are they not all elevating influences when properly appreciated? But the right enjoyment of these by the uninitiated is a very difficult matter. My friend Winn and I simply join in her gatherings in order to further the good cause."

"I assure you," Winn said, bluntly "I am actuated by no such exalted motives. I go because I am invited, and, as a matter of business, cannot afford to lose patronage. Mrs. Harpfield is a client."

"Which is a better reason than none at all," Nadine said, drily.

"Oh, I won't say that when Mr. Greenbank speaks for himself he is not to be relied upon," laughed Winn. "Our positions are altogether different. He, fortunately, need court no favours."

Then followed a pause. Whilst the pair were deliberating how best to reinstate themselves in her good opinion, she was asking herself: how far can I trust these two? How far are they in Mrs. Harpfield's secrets, her accomplices?

She glanced from one to the other. Were they trucklers to a base will? The elder looked as if he lived for amusement rather than for downright mischief. The younger betrayed nothing more than the abnormal alertness of one, in vulgar phrase, determined to get on in the world. The remembrance of last night's scene admonished caution. Yet the candour of a noble nature would have its way.

"It is not astonishing that Mrs. Harpfield should have so many allies, seeing that she has the disposal of Philip Summerhill's money. What astonishes and pains me

beyond measure is the fact of the poor boy being so utterly neglected," she cried

Both men winced ; Winn, ever the readiest at speech, made haste to exonerate himself.

"It is his health that makes him appear so. I have begged Mrs. Harpfield to let him skate or ride with me, again and again, but she says he is not strong enough."

"And remember, dear young lady," put in Greenbank, suavely, "Mrs. Harpfield, like yourself, is a new-comer here ; she only hired Reedmere Hall last summer ; there has been no time for making acquaintances."

Nadine looked bitter and unconvinced. She felt there was no good in pursuing this unuseful conversation.

"And permit me," added Greenbank ; "you speak of Mrs. Harpfield having the disposal of the lad's money, but hypothetically, I presume ? You have no exact information and at first hand on the subject ?"

"Can anything be plainer ?" cried Nadine. "Do we want facts written down in black and white, bawled in our ears, when we see them acted before our eyes ? You may both be as ignorant of the circumstances as I am ; but being as you are, English gentlemen, seeing, as you must do, what is taking place at Reedmere Hall—on the one hand a spoliation, on the other a victim—then it is your duty either to stay away or to interfere in the cause of justice."

As the brave girl uttered these fiery words, indignation beautified and ennobled her. If Winn had found her distracting before, he felt that she was irresistible now. Her cheeks were flushed with delicate rose, her blue eyes flashed, there was a splendour about her that made the two listeners appear insignificant and abashed. Both prepared a palinode, but before a word of excuse had passed their lips Nadine was gone. A finger-post here indicated the way to Reedmere. With a hurried inclination of the head and a hasty word of thanks she left them.

"On my word," Greenbank said, "on my word!"

Winn shrugged his shoulders.

"My conscience is as clear as her own, that I can aver. A man cannot demand a certificate of character from his clients; but I do not intend to patronise any more of those mongrel assemblies; I don't feel at home. Of course we are verging towards a state of social equality, I know that; but the transition stage is painful. But now, between ourselves, who is Mrs. Harpfield, and who is Philip Summerhill?"

"There is no mystery about the matter, I believe," Greenbank replied, with affected carelessness. "She would tell you herself, I dare say, if you asked her. This poor boy then is the child of a former fellow-servant of hers, an extremely handsome girl, who was married by

a rich sexagenarian—her employer—for her beauty; on the death of both parents, the guardianship of the child devolved upon the person they both trusted most in the world, Mary Ann Harpfield. Those are the simple facts. You see that all is straightforward and above-board."

"You do not say if balls and champagne-suppers were strictly enjoined in the old man's will?"

"Mrs. Harpfield is no doubt at entire liberty to use her own discretion. And could any woman of spirit be expected to shut herself up in the country, and devote herself to an idiot boy, without compensation? As it is, the life is irksome enough."

"And that Falstaffian chef, who cooks such admirable little luncheons for Mrs. Harpfield—and I presume for himself—I suppose is also a kind of reward for faithful service. I wish the lady in command would give me his place."

"Philip's father was in opulent circumstances; he would naturally wish his son to be brought up in the style to which he was himself accustomed."

"But, my dear sir," Winn said, impatiently, "it seems to me that this extravagant household, the horses, the carriage, the cook, and the rest of it, are kept up solely for Mrs. Harpfield's enjoyment. The boy seems quite a secondary consideration."

"What would you have? Have we not

just learned that he has a private physician ?
A little prince could have no more."

"Oh, of course," sneered Winn, "the child must be kept alive at any cost. It would never do to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. Most likely if he dies, the money goes to some charity or other."

"Very likely it is so. But don't you really believe in kindness of heart, especially where a woman is concerned ? May it not be within the scope of possibility that Mrs. Harpfield, having had the care of the lad from his earliest years, entertains some fondness for him, would wish to keep him alive for her own sake as well ? Human nature is made up of folly and indiscretion, I admit, but down-right villainy is a lesser leaven of the lump."

"Then we will set down our hostess of last night as foolish and indiscreet."

"You make no allowance whatever for the promptings of ambition. Women are born to rule as well as men, some of them need a wide sphere of action, a field for their energies. I think all that Mrs. Harpfield's enemies can accuse her of is a love of display."

Winn suddenly lapsed into silence. The thought occurred to him—does this man want to marry Mrs. Harpfield, or, in other words, Philip Summerhill's fortune ?

He determined to let the matter drop.

Greenbank, however, had still something to say.

"You are a young man," he began ; "let

me give you, not a bit of advice, but my frank opinion, my unbiassed view of the matter as it more immediately concerns yourself. This lady, so indeed we may all call her, is a power in this place ; I do not think any one who has his way to make can afford to neglect her. It is not her fault, but her misfortune, that she was born in a subordinate sphere of life. To help her in the laudable ambition of bettering her circumstances, and to help yourself at the same time, seems to me a mere exercise of common sense."

Winn looked indifferent.

"Now, if I were twenty-five years younger," pursued the other, "or were beginning life, shall I tell you what I would do? Marry Mrs. Harpfield."

The scales fell from the other's eyes now. Too much taken aback to speak, he heard the parable to the end.

"I should say to myself," continued Mephistopheles, "Fortune may beckon to the right or to the left, but she is certainly before me. I have only to go straight ahead. Perhaps waiting and shilly-shallying might turn out as well for me. I might later on marry some pretty, well-educated girl with a handsome fortune. Such things are dim possibilities only, whereas here I have, well, if not youth and beauty——"

"Leave out the last word, for Heaven's sake," Winn put in.

"If not youth and good looks enough to please me, then at least a fair equivalent, amiability, agreeable manners, knowledge of the world and a capacity for business. Would any man in his senses expect more?"

"Not in a partner, if it were a question of setting up a shop. However, I am a poor judge of such matters. I have no intention of marrying whatever at present, and when I do, I shall certainly not pay court to a woman twenty years my senior."

"The vain animal man is! My dear fellow, I'll lay a wager there are not ten years' difference, no, nor anything like it, between our friend and yourself. We men always flatter ourselves that the advantage is on our side if the thing is at all doubtful."

Winn proffered no remark. The other went on as if summarizing all that had gone before.

"You may not set much store by my opinion, you won't deny that I have had plenty of experience, and the moral of life seems to be this—first cultivate respectability, then comfort. Now marriage is undoubtedly respectable, and money is comfortable. That is why, were I a young man with my fortune to make, I should marry Mrs. Harpfield."

"Would you really?" asked Winn. "I am sorry we can't pursue this interesting topic further; but our ways part here, you

see, and I am rather in a hurry. Good day."

The two friends separated, Greenbank taking the high-road that led to the town, Winn a cross cut to his smart little brand-new villa in the village.

As the young man walked on alone, his brow grew gloomy. Nadine's reproof had dumbfounded, humiliated him, and Greenbank's innuendoes, coming immediately afterwards, lent deeper edge to his vexation. The thought that he was looked upon as Mrs. Harpfield's possible suitor was odious; yet he confessed that his behaviour had been such as to warrant the surmise. He ought never to have accepted her invitations, nor allowed sociability to get beyond the exigencies of business.

Keenly as he resented Greenbank's personalities, he owned that from a worldly point of view the reasoning was sound. For a man in his own position, without money, not without debts, hampered with the calling of a gentleman, such a marriage would prove the cutting of the Gordian knot. In fact, if his circumstances did not speedily improve, he must seek some desperate solution.

Had the other never whispered these promptings in his ear, he said to himself that he should not for a moment have dreamed of thus bartering conscience for

money. What irritated him beyond measure was his inability to forget such worldly counsels. Again and again, he declared that it could never be, that no conditions of fortune would induce him to marry Mrs. Harpfield. Yet the poison instilled in his mind was not to be got rid of. He could not lose sight of the probabilities put before him.

Perhaps but for that retributive vision of Nadine he would have laughed away the matter. It was her generous indignation, her noble remonstrance, that made him feel just then altogether base and contemptible. Fortunately for his own peace of mind he had not seen her the evening before. He was not aware how much the scene she gazed on then had intensified her feelings against him.

What he felt conscious of was deep, almost immeasurable self-contempt. This beautiful, high-minded girl seemed to him wholly apart from the rest of the world. He had seen no woman at all like her; but her chief distinction lay, not in that uncommon foreign beauty, or in any unconventional charm of look, manner, or dress. She had fascinated him by the force of a noble initiative; in her fine passion she had appealed to all that was best, purest in human nature, and the appeal was a rebuke. Could he only act so as to merit her praise! Could he only become her ally in the good cause she had taken up!

The glow these possibilities called up on Winn's cheek soon faded away. A thousand circumstances prevented him from breaking with Mrs. Harpfield, and he felt it already; an alliance with Nadine meant nothing less—the choice between God and Mammon.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HEIR'S BANQUET.

MRS. HARPFIELD, as well as Nadine, was prompt to act. That stormy little scene in the school room was no sooner over, than she set to work to thwart her foiler's plans and counter-act her influence.

Her first care had been for Philip. The Mr. Pakeman of last night, now plain Tommy, was summoned from his boot-cleaning, to help the young heir in the arrangement of his supper-table.

"Don't stop to tidy yourself, Tommy, come this moment as you are," his mistress had cried out; under penalty of her severe displeasure, perhaps even dismissal, he would have risked appearing before herself in his blacking apron and sleeves. But Philip did not notice; Philip would not mind! Tommy went willingly enough; and, whilst Mr. Don lazily smoked a cigarette and read the news-

paper, the pair set out the remnants of last night's feast. A cupboard full of broken victuals of the choicer kind, faded flowers and table ornaments, was placed at their disposal. In her frugality, Mrs. Harpfield had ordered that not so much as an empty cracker should be wasted, the sugar-plum and the motto being used the night before, the coloured tinsel reserved for to-day.

The table presented a curious appearance when the conjoint labours of Philip and Tommy came to an end. There was something comic and pathetic in the mixture of dilapidation and luxury, tawdriness and elegance. So tempting the cates, so keen the appetites at the ball, that not a single dish had remained untasted. In most cases by far the greater portion was gone, and as will usually happen on such occasions, the more attractive one.

Philip's share of a savoury pie consisted of clammy undercrust and untempting morsels, the glossy orange-brown top, the truffles, the game having vanished altogether. Jellies had fared no better at the hands of the wassailers. Elaborate, pagoda-like structures, decorated with candied fruits and sweetmeats, had been unroofed and undermined, the remainder toppling over. Not a vestige of the pretty, tempting trimmings was to be seen. Nothing daunted, Tommy and Philip made of the ruby and

lemon-coloured fragments a centre-piece, camellias having lost half their petals, forming the decoration.

The appearance of highly ornamented creams and whip syllabubs was shabbier still; the velvety surface sprinkled with pink and yellow sugar and comfits, once broken into, nothing remained but to stir the whole vigorously with a ladle, the result being a compound as unenticing as the contents of a house-painter's pot.

Even worse had fared Mr. Don's wonderful tarts. Those wonderful productions, so perfect in form—faultless circles, ovals, and ellipses when emerging from the oven, had been hacked and hewed into rhomboids and triangles; what was more deplorable still, in the process the ingredients had run together. When placed on the table yesterday, the clear bright preserve had been as distinct from the transparent crust as a jewel from its gold setting, now jam and pastry formed a nondescript mass. "We know what it is made of, anyhow," was Tommy's comforting remark, as he set down the compound with the rest.

The table decorations were more pitiful than the dishes. The delicate hothouse ferns, the hyacinths and azaleas in pots, now adorned Mrs. Harpfield's sitting-room; even the cut flowers had been gleaned for her benefit. Camellias bereft of a petal, sprays of limp

white lilac, faded primroses, and abundance of garden evergreens were left for Philip.

It must be admitted that Tommy showed considerable skill in his use of such materials. He made bouquets of holly and ivy, placing the flowers so as to hide their dilapidation. He twisted the torn cracker papers into little rosettes and knots with which he trimmed the dishes; lastly, in order to give the table a livelier appearance, he wheedled unlimited supplies of apples and oranges out of Mr. Don, which were piled up on high stands at intervals. In fact, as he summarized matters, there was plenty for those to eat who weren't particularly hungry.

Their business was just finished when Mrs. Harpfield entered.

"What a pretty, pretty supper table!" she cried, going up to Philip and placing one arm round his shoulder. "How you will enjoy yourself to-night!"

"Harpie," the lad said, not timidly, only appealingly; he never felt afraid of her, she was too kind, too caressing to inspire fear, "Harpie, I give the supper, of course, but let me stay with Nadine to-night instead."

"Invite guests to find your own chair empty?" Mrs. Harpfield replied, outwardly smooth and mildly persuasive, inwardly ruffled and uneasy. "My dearest boy, that would never do."

Philip gave in at once. Acquiescence was

a habit with him, and hitherto had cost him little or nothing. Now Mrs. Harpfield discerned a cloud on his brow.

"Why, Mr. Don is going to sing a new comic song; you will laugh till you cry, and Tommy is to perform his last tumbling tricks—nothing delights you more than to see Tommy stand on his head," she urged.

Philip smiled, laughed aloud as he recalled Mr. Don's songs and Tommy's antics.

"Can't I invite Nadine, then? I think she would be amused too."

"No, Mademoiselle Nadine is proud; when you invite her, it must be to meet dukes and duchesses," Mrs. Harpfield added, shaking her head with a smile, but rancour in her heart.

Philip no more read her thoughts than if he had been blind.

He said nothing. Since his acquaintance with Nadine he had grown reticent to Mrs. Harpfield. Not a day passed but he checked himself when about to confide in her; he had another confident now.

"So all is ready for to-night; come then and practise your dancing. You always waltz with me at your parties, remember. Tommy, you can now finish cleaning the boots."

Dancing was a pastime Philip loved, and Mrs. Harpfield encouraged the taste. Mr. Don, who could turn his hand to any-

thing, would play a waltz or mazurka on the violin, Fanny, or occasionally the great lady herself, acting as partner; thus the moments flitted merrily. Since Nadine's coming the boy showed little relish for these dancing lessons; one by one his old amusements lost their charm. He neither rebelled nor sulked when invited to polk with Fanny, play skittles with Tommy, or make toffee with the cook; but all was done automatically. To-day, when Mrs. Harpfield looked in, she found him curiously inspecting the violin, whilst his two companions danced together, Mr. Don whistling the tune. She proffered no remark at the time, but as soon as the so-called lesson was over, beckoned Fanny aside.

"Fanny," she began, closing the door of her little sitting-room, the room devoted to business, not the handsomely-furnished, spacious apartment in which she received visitors, "Fanny, you are no dunderhead; surely you can contrive to amuse Master Philip just for one hour in the day?"

"Master Philip" was very seldom heard on Mrs. Harpfield's lips now. Philip could remember the time when every one in the house, even Harpie herself, used to call him thus; by little and little, he had come to be plain Philip to all the household.

The more distant and respectful epithet was now resorted to in the present instance

by way of example. When Mrs. Harpfield spoke of her charge as a young gentleman, she had always some ulterior motive in view. Fanny was not admonished for undue familiarity or want of decorum, she was only reminded of the important fact of Philip's social condition. Philip himself was a nonentity, but circumstances made him very important. There was no necessity to address him or treat him as the young master of the house, but not for a moment must it be forgotten, that in an evil hour he might become so. Without a word, a hint of her deep-laid schemes, she had contrived to make every one of her tools and satellites see things from her own point of view.

"Master Philip is a wholly different creature since that foreign lady doctor took him in hand," said Fanny. "It is not my fault, ma'am, nor Mr. Don's either, that he wouldn't dance, his head is full of other things."

"Listen, Fanny; you are a girl of sense, and I don't speak to you as if you were a child or a fool. I shall send Mademoiselle Nadine away."

Fanny opened her large eyes. She was a quick-witted, foolish little thing, but not without human sympathies. She always shed tears when puppies had to be drowned, especially if they were pretty.

"What will Master Philip do?"

"That is just the difficulty," retorted Mrs. Harpfield, in a sharp, irritated voice. "Before sending her away we must give Philip something else to think about," and she studied Fanny with a meaning look. "Of course he couldn't expect her to stay for ever; go she must, some time or other. But when the boy takes a fancy he is terribly tenacious. Do you remember what a time of it we had when his pet dog died, two years ago? I thought he would have fretted himself to death, and he is ten times fonder of Mademoiselle Nadine than he was of little Floss. It is very amazing."

Once more she perused Fanny's face.

"Don't you think you could make him fond of you?" she got out at last.

Fanny giggled. The bare notion of trying to make any one fond of her seemed preposterous. Everybody was only too fond of her without an effort of her own. Unlimited devotion on the part of the other sex was the plague of her life.

"He is such a baby still," she said, laughing. "He doesn't think me more worth looking at than old Mrs. Poppins, the washerwoman, I'll be bound, or Betty, the charwoman; we are much of a muchness in Philip's eyes, I dare say."

"Nonsense," Mrs. Harpfield broke in, severely. "You know as well as I do, that a lad of fifteen is not a baby. You have

only to make much of the boy, to flatter him a little, and you could do what you liked, even make him glad to have Mademoiselle Nadine go. We must get rid of her somehow, and Philip must not fret. That is the long and the short of it."

Whilst this poison was being distilled into Fanny's mind, the girl listened with the artless look of a child learning her catechism. Not a sign of disapproval was to be read on that perfect little face of hers. Quite perfect it was as far as mere outward perfection went, not a line that needed correction, not a tint that needed subduing; but it was beauty on a small scale, and of the unspiritual type.

Fanny was no base intriguer. Were the world a passive place, such natures could live amiably and harmlessly; but other wills acted powerfully on her own, she could not discriminate, or thought she could not discriminate between what was good or evil.

"Now do not begin as if you had not another moment to live. Don't let Mademoiselle Nadine see what you are driving at," pursued the monitress. "Your business is just to make Philip gradually like your company better than hers. That is all; and, remember, he is much quicker of apprehension than he appears to be, much older than he seems. In fact, he is no child."

"That is what I always say," murmured

Fanny, innocently. She had given expression to an imprudent thought unawares.

"No child in many ways, I mean," Mrs. Harpfield added, with emphasis. "In most things, of course, he will remain one all his life. But he must be amused, and we must get that person out of the house. Now you can go back to your dusting."

Fanny returned to her work, not to unravel the ethic significance of her mistress's commands, but to ponder as to the best mode of carrying them out. It immediately occurred to her that she had never before put on a ball-dress in honour of Philip's parties; she would do so to night, in order to flatter and please him. With what astonishment he would see her dressed in sky-blue, with flowers in her hair! How she would joke with him and tease him into admiring her! Fanny had skimmed the surface of her mistress's compliments. She had not, as yet, gone deeper. It seemed to her an innocent and laughable freak enough thus to make the boy fancy himself a man. The cruelty of awakening affections only to bereave, never once occurred to her; but this and nothing else was meant. Nadine's pure image was to be blackened in Philip's eyes, and room made for the flimsy vision of a Fanny Farthing.

To Nadine Mrs. Harpfield merely said, in her most decisive, driest tone :

"We will, if you please, leave matters so, then, Mademoiselle Nadine. Your engagement with me terminates at Midsummer."

The speech might have been addressed to a scullion; but, only too thankful to be quit of a long harangue, and be rid of such a presence at any price, Nadine bowed civil acquiescence.

CHAPTER VIII.

SPRING IN SUFFOLK.

IF winter is morose and bitter in Suffolk, nowhere is spring lovelier or more seductive, although, fortunately for the lover of nature, the tourist world has not yet found it out. Perhaps herein consists the principal charm of my dear native corner of earth. Amid these remote villages you are not reminded of those deadly enemies of natural beauty, bricks and mortar. The speculating builder has not invaded these rural retreats; nor the naturalist—birds, flowers, and butterflies are for the most part left to themselves.

Why, indeed, should any one spend time and money on a tour in Suffolk, seeing that he would have nothing more marvellous to talk of on his return than meadows golden with cowslips and woodland lanes? Waterfalls

and mountains there are none, its quiet rivers flow between cornfields and pastures. No surprises meet the eye, only tender reminders of childhood's earliest joys, field flowers growing abundantly for any hand to gather them; young larches, emerald green, pricking against the blue sky, violets in shady places; whilst no less dear and familiar, is the music of this rustic world, the cackling of hens in some farmyard nestled among the trees, the bleating of young lambs, the skylarks soaring above the brown fields, the thousand and one welcome voices of the spring. But long before the larches show their budding green against the bright sky—perhaps one of the earliest impressions of natural beauty received by a childish mind—spring makes itself felt in Suffolk. Whilst the trees are yet bare of leaves, and the hedgerows hardly show a blossom, there are still signs innumerable of the great reawakening of the earth. Our young eyes are reminded of the mysteriousness of life long ere we have learned anything of its sorrows. The tiny buds of the hawthorn, mere crimson beads, soon to develop into waxen sheaths, teach us their lesson; still more strikingly the little purple and yellow shells of the snail on mossy bank, the lady-bird, as we fancy, aroused from its long slumber, and the red-throated nestlings we are lifted up to glance at, in the garden tree. Existence

seems to us, in childish days, a mere awakening after sleep. Who shall say that we are wiser when we grow old?

And when spring came what scenes of enchantment were at hand! Years after, the sight of those meadows, golden with cowslips, haunts the eye that has gazed on them in childhood; the fragrance of the white and purple violets growing by the wayside lingers on the senses, the wood anemone and lady's-smock starring the level lines of green; the blaze of buttercups on a hill-side seem to dazzle as they dazzled first.

Reedmere Hall did not stand amid scenery immortalised on canvas by the great painters of Suffolk; nor was it within sight of its noble river. The fine Elizabethan manor-house, for many generations used as a farmhouse, faced the road—one of those charming roads, with flowering banks and lofty trees, that may be called, indeed, a long woodland lane. On either side stretched the level fields and meadows, the homely, prosaic landscape contrasting strangely with the romantic, superb old house. The first feeling of a stranger would be of regret. So imposing a structure should be surrounded by a noble park, or at least spacious grounds. Orchards, farm-buildings, and crofts, have nevertheless here their peculiar appropriateness. Do they not symbolise the solid, unpretentious character of our ancestors, who thought more of utility than show, and

could better spare ornamental walks and garden plots than fruit-trees and asparagus beds?

Here, then, in spite of dark passions and portentous ambitious warring against them, Nadine and Philip entered upon a sunny idyllic life. How long it would last none could say, but for a time all was outwardly calm.

It struck her as the most painful feature about the boy's bringing up, that he had never been taught to love Nature; up to a certain point, indeed, every human creature may be said to do so; most of us admire a fine day, clean roads, we dislike fogs, excessive rain-falls, and poor apple crops. Beyond this a love of Nature can hardly be called general. Shop windows, the sight of a funeral, or of a house on fire, are much more to people's taste. Philip was no exception to this rule. He had been taught to delight in dominoes, puzzles, acrobatic displays, and penny merri-ments, but never to use his eyes out of doors. The beautiful world of Nature had remained a sealed book to him.

"Why do you look so happy?" he asked of Nadine one day.

Spring had burst upon the land suddenly, and the cowslips had come before their time. As if tired of the long winter's sleep, and ready to make any excuse for appearing so early, there they were in crowds at the first beck of the sun, the first note of the cuckoo,

their little bells of deep gold waving gleefully amid the grass, fairy things triumphant once more to have found their place.

Nor did the appearance of the cowslips seem to cloud the contentment around them. They eclipsed every flower in sight, but the lady-smock danced gleefully in the sunshine, the wood anemones reared their modest flower-heads all the same, the banks were studded with celandine and primrose, and deep joy seemed to reign everywhere.

Yet all this sweetness and beauty lay in a very small compass. The meadow in which Nadine and Philip disported themselves was bordered by a lofty hedge, over which bent the pure heavens. Beyond and around, stretched level fields and sequestered paths, with here and there clumps of venerable trees, or little shady ponds, haunts of the kingfisher. No vast horizons, no blue distances, only one of Nature's gardens.

"Why do I look so happy?" Nadine replied, smiling at the naïve question. Then suddenly saddened, overcome as she was wont to be by a thought of unbearable painfulness, she added: "Think for a moment. Fancy yourself blind or shut up in prison. Then look around and wonder why I am happy."

"It is only a meadow full of cowslips," said the boy.

Nadine was a perpetual puzzle to him.

He used to say to her sometimes that she must have dropped down from some other planet.

Nadine gazed on the glowing scene, and drank in the deliciousness of the hour, one long draught more, then a mood almost of despair came over her. Was not Philip himself blind, in prison? What collyrium knew she of to heal these unseeing eyes; how could she unfetter that close-hemmed spirit? His intelligence was beyond the average, it was the moral sense, the intellectual faculty that lay dormant, had rather been drugged to sleep.

"Only a meadow full of cowslips?" she cried, with a tone of almost sorrowful reproach, yet moved by deep passion. "Listen, Philip, there are human beings like ourselves, who would give wealth untold, ay, years of existence, to look upon such a sight, breathe such air as this. One such prisoner I know of, a countryman of my own, an upright, brave man, who made the government his enemy by standing up for the rights of the people. He was condemned to years of imprisonment in a dungeon, and when the sentence was passed, he stood up and begged that his judge would sentence him instead to—what do you think?—a week of liberty, and then death! 'Let me die,' he cried, 'only first let me look on God's beautiful world once more.'"

"Did the judge consent?" asked Philip,

childishly, more interested in the story than in the moral.

"He might as well have asked for his liberty altogether," Nadine replied, with a look of anguish. "No, Philip, he is shut up in a dungeon still, and when I roam about among the spring flowers, under the beautiful heavens, I think of him after my first joy, and my heart is ready to break."

"Do you love him so very much, then?" asked the lad, gazing at her anxiously.

That deeply sympathetic tone and earnest gaze, made her look at him with astonishment. It was the first time she had seen him really moved by another's distress. She had succeeded in reaching his intellect, awakening his mental faculties; had she also touched his moral sense, making him feel that his own existence but formed a portion of the integral life of humanity? The conviction brought deep thankfulness. One step more remained to be taken. The mind, the heart, were here; but the boy's soul, how could she quicken that highest consciousness of all, call into activity that faculty, awe, reverence, piety—call it what we will—that lifts the earth-born to purer regions and clothes with dignity this poor human life?

"Do I love him?" she repeated. "He is the would-be saviour of my country, and I and thousands more would suffer for him, even die for him. I will tell you his story

another time. We must not weep on this first spring day. Only just think what a beautiful and enviable lot is his! To be so honoured and beloved that others would exchange their liberty and enjoyment for his privations and misery."

"They say so; but would they?" asked the lad.

"They do," was Nadine's passionate reply. "Not only men, but women, even weak girls bring upon themselves exile, imprisonment, death, because they teach his doctrine and follow his example."

"And does any good come of it all?"

"Perhaps no good of marketable quality, Philip; nothing we can buy or sell for gold, nothing that will cushion life softly and make the day pleasant, but good of other kind—can you doubt it? Do you not see the difference between being comfortable and being high-minded?"

"Between Harpie and you," Philip said, with a touch of malice. "Oh, yes, Nadine, I understand you. It is Harpie who is comfortable, and you who are high-minded."

That hated name made Nadine forget the cowslips, and the clear radiance of the spring. When her look of disconcertment passed away, she answered, smiling deprecatingly:

"I keep high-minded men and women before my eyes, and wish to be like them, you mean that."

Philip glanced around him cautiously as if even the hedgerows might have listeners. A strange emotion seemed to take possession of him, he changed colour, began to speak, lapsed into agitated silence, then, with quivering lips and filling eyes, got out his first sentence.

"I want to tell you something that has been in my mind a long while. You know it well enough, Nadine: Harpie will never let me do as I like. You stay on for a time, but as soon as ever I am strong, she will send you away."

Again he looked around, and assuring himself that they were alone, went on more eagerly than before:

"I have thought of a plan. Harpie goes to London on business sometimes. The very next time we will run away together. She could never find us if we once got to your own country."

"My dear boy, my poor Philip," Nadine said, between laughing and crying.

"Don't say no," the boy added, with painful earnestness. "As soon as I am old enough, I could take the place of usher in a school, and I would not mind what I had to eat and drink, so long as I were with you, Nadine. I am like the people you have just been telling me of. I would go to prison, endure anything for your sake. You are good, and every one else here is bad, and if you leave me, I shall grow bad also."

Was not her prayer already answered, thought Nadine? Had not the boy's better nature suddenly asserted itself; that inner voice hitherto mute, the voice of the soul, become audible?

She clasped his hand and looked into his face with an expression of sisterly, almost maternal fondness and strengthening.

"Dear, dear Philip," she said, "we cannot, we must not, do as you say; it would be wrong. But I promise you one thing, I will never abandon you."

Her looks, even more than those sweet, encouraging words, afforded a ray of comfort. It was only that. Philip could not in the least see any more than Nadine herself how he was to be set free. It seemed as if nothing short of a miracle could open his prison doors, never more to close on him again.

Was his fate to be that of the captive prince in Calderon's immortal story, the existence that had been but a dream to be exchanged for a dream that was life indeed? Would these long, slow years of bondage end in a bright and joyous enlargement? or, like the hero of awful Greek tragedy, was he the victim of ancestral sins, heir of guilt that had heaped curses on his innocent head?

Their cowslip-gathering over, they turned into a wooded lane leading homewards, when

a pleasant, well-modulated voice accosted them from the other side of the hedge.

It was Winn, who, with an assistant, had been taking measurements in some fields adjoining.

"How d'ye do, Philip?" he said, cheerily, after having respectfully greeted Nadine. "I promised some day to show you how we measure a field. Would you like to see now?"

Philip flushed with delight; anything to do with abstract reasoning or mathematical science delighted him. Whilst Winn lucidly explained the first principles of trigonometry, he listened without losing a word, much less a shade of meaning.

A man is never seen to better advantage than when ministering to the gratification of the young. Winn's physiognomy was agreeable to look at now, as he threw himself heart and soul into the boy's lesson.

Nadine, watching the pair, reproached herself for the harsh speech of a few weeks back. She had misjudged Winn. Reckless and imprudent he might be, but one with such a face and such a voice could hardly be the ally of a base woman.

She was scheming how to secure a few minutes' talk with him alone, when he solved the difficulty. He also had his own reasons for desiring an explanation.

"Now," he said to the lad, at the end

of a quarter of an hour, "you have as much theory as you can take in at once. Go with my assistant, Mr. Roberts, to the end of yonder field, and he will show you what we have been doing this afternoon."

The boy acquiesced delightedly. He was hardly out of hearing when Winn began his vindication.

"I wanted to see you," he said, with a frank, at the same time self-commendatory voice. "I have made a step, shall I say, towards disarming your criticism, even, perhaps, earning your approval?"

Nadine's face showed a glow of generous feeling. He had, then, remonstrated with Mrs. Harpfield, protested against her treatment of Philip? The boy now possessed two champions instead of one.

"I am, as I think I explained to you beholden to Mrs. Harpfield; in other words, she is a client I cannot afford to slight, much less affront. So much for my appearance at her entertainments, and an intimacy which, from your point of view, may well appear inexcusable. And now for the weightier part of the business—the answer to the query: Who is Mrs. Harpfield — who is Philip Summerhill? I am in a position to reply for once and for all, not, alas! in the sense you would wish."

Nothing could more clearly bring out the difference between Nadine's passionate sym-

pathy and Winn's faint but kindly interest than their behaviour now. Whilst Winn was more occupied with reinstating himself in her good opinion than in Philip's future, she listened with the keen, almost agonised suspense of one awaiting the verdict that means life or death.

"I referred to Mr. Greenbank, in the first instance, and he told me the poor boy's story, which indeed has no mystery about it," Winn went on. "Philip Summerhill's mother, it seems, was a former fellow-servant of Mrs. Harpfield's, a strikingly handsome girl hardly able to write her name, who, nevertheless, turned the head of her employer. This rich, elderly widower married her, and Philip was the only child born of the marriage. The old man died, leaving his property to his wife in trust for the boy; and a little later she died also, appointing Mrs. Harpfield as his sole guardian. No, I am here misinforming you. There was another guardian appointed at the time, it was only through his death that the reins of government came into Mrs. Harpfield's hands. But stay, you shall have the particulars in black and white; I have written them down on purpose for you."

He took out his pocket-book and handed her a memorandum with another self-approving smile.

"For I must say this much on my own

behalf. I have been at the trouble of seeing Mr. Summerhill's will. I made the journey to London on purpose. Ah! there is one more point I should mention. Should Philip die a minor, the property to which he is heir goes to charities of various kinds. So, you see, Mrs. Harpfield is merely the stewardess of his fortunes, and I dare say a worse might easily be found."

He qualified the conclusion by adding: "Consider the temptation to any one in her position! I dare say thirty pounds a year, if as much, was all the money that formerly passed through her hands every year. Is it any wonder that the handling of large sums should make her lavish now?"

Nadine answered mechanically. A look almost of hopelessness came into her face. If all this were true, then her gloomiest misgivings were realised, and Philip was altogether in Mrs. Harpfield's power.

"There is one fact, not to be done away with, to reassure you," Winn added, amiably, desirous of inspiring her, also anxious for his own sake to see the cloud lifted from that fair face. "If the boy lives, he will in time become a man. A few years hence, and Philip, like the rest of us, will be emancipated for his weal or woe."

Nadine's face sharpened with keen anguish.

"Oh!" she cried, "you do not suspect

the vileness there may be in a human heart. Can you be blind to what is going on? It is as plain as that the sun shines overhead. Mrs. Harpfield will never let Philip become a man in the real sense of the word. Her interests pull the other way. She will pass him off for an idiot, contrive to make an idiot of him for her own wicked ends."

He looked dubious.

"That is a very grave accusation," he said, biting his lip—somehow whilst pleading Mrs. Harpfield's cause he felt to be pleading his own—"and surely an accusation not quite warranted by the facts?"

"What further evidence is needed?" Nadine cried, all her former contempt once more surging within her heart. This pleasant-faced, pleasant-voiced Winn must be abject indeed if he could condone wickedness for mere worldly ends. He was young like herself. That was surely no reason to spare him.

"You see what Philip is," she went on. "The poor boy hungers and thirsts for knowledge. There is no physical drawback to prevent him from making his mark. He ought to have education, companionship, all the advantages that any other lad would have in his position. This bodily weakness which Mrs. Harpfield makes such capital of, he will outgrow, but not unless he is properly managed. Left to her, his mental powers

will dwindle, he will sink to the level of an imbecile; any intervention then would be too late. Now is the moment to step in and save him from a fate a thousand times worse than death."

"Is it not true that the poor little fellow is, or was once, subject to epileptic fits?" asked Winn, with the air of one anxious to sift the matter to the bottom.

"Is that a reason for treating him like an idiot? The blind, the deaf, the crippled, are these not human entities like our more favoured selves? Philip's mind and body will not be strengthened by a process of wilful, deliberate enervation. What he wants is, unwearied stimulus and perpetual bracing up. This epileptic tendency, I feel sure, may be outgrown, is already partly outgrown, but only by a treatment the exact opposite to that of Mrs. Harpfield."

"You are a physician," Winn said, after a pause. "You speak authoritatively. Why not lay all this before her?"

"Ask Mrs. Harpfield what I said some weeks ago," Nadine replied, not without a touch of malice. "For once she heard the truth then. But this was the result: as soon as ever it is practicable to do so, she will send me away. I am only suffered to remain because she fears that my going might affect Philip seriously. And I need perhaps hardly add, I stay here sorely against my will, to say

nothing of my own interests. The atmosphere of the place is not only uncongenial, but loathsome to me."

Winn reddened, for the observation seemed a covert reproach. He was a frequent visitor at Reedmere Hall, and probably Nadine knew it.

"I will speak to Mrs. Harpfield about the boy," he said. "I will try what persuasion can do."

"As well try to persuade the beast of prey to relinquish its booty," Nadine replied, bitterly scornful. "You have refused to read this woman's character, then. You shut your eyes to her deep-laid schemes. Instead of persuasion, have recourse to cruel, hard-hitting truth; make her blush for these wicked machinations. Tell her in plain words what you—what any other right-minded human being—hold her to be. Make her afraid, not of worldly retribution—for that, alas, is hardly likely to overtake her!—but of her own conscience. If you can do that you will be Philip's friend, my friend, indeed."

The glow of her generous ardour communicated itself to the young man. He looked at his inspiring companion with an expression wholly new to him; not only chivalrous admiration, but reverence was written on his ingratiating, if not altogether candid countenance, as he replied :

"What is there, indeed, that I would not do for the sake of earning such a privilege? You have put me on my mettle."

Nadine smiled, but without a touch of coquetry. She was only thinking of Philip.

"You will at any rate make an effort on the poor boy's behalf," she said, holding out her hand. "I thank you from my heart in advance. Philip's lesson in land-surveying must end, I think, now. I will take him home. Good-bye."

But Philip would himself run back to Winn with a radiant face.

"Mr. Winn, Mr. Winn," he cried, breathlessly, "when I am a little older, will you take me as your apprentice?"

"If Mrs. Harpfield consents——" were the words that rose spontaneously to Winn's lips. He checked himself in Nadine's presence, and replied instead:

"We will see when the time comes."

Nadine glanced up triumphantly. Was this the idiot, this the imbecile to be kept in perpetual tutelage? her face said. Then the pair left him.

He watched the slight figure wrapt in splendid Russian fur till it disappeared, then turned slowly and dejectedly homeward.

How gladly he would have fulfilled his mission at once, whilst the glow of Nadine's enthusiasm yet lingered about him! How thankfully would he have acknowledged him-

self free to yield to her pure and tender fascination! But whilst secretly arguing that a more propitious moment for intervention was sure to come, and that just now it was especially important to him not in any way to ruffle his client, he knew that the motive for inaction lay deeper.

Nothing at the present juncture seemed so desirable as Nadine's good opinion, nothing of less value than Mrs. Harpfield's friendship, but the self-spread toils were already about his feet.

In spite of his light-hearted manner and airy cheerfulness, Winn was in reality just then a care-laden, harassed mortal. Life was full of imbroglios, and he saw no immediate way out of the labyrinth of difficulties—but one.

Truth to tell, he was in debt, and Mrs. Harpfield, with plenty of money at her command, was evidently determined to be his friend.

CHAPTER IX.

UNIDYLLIC.

IF Nadine had one good reason for wishing to be rid of Mrs. Harpfield, Philip's Harpie had a thousand for wishing to be rid of Nadine. Again and again she cursed the

ill-luck that made her dependent upon her bitterest enemy. For Philip might dance with Fanny Farthing and still love the society of Mr. Don and Tommy, he was none the less infatuated with his new friend. Mrs. Harpfield was a very deep woman, and she had studied her pupil's character to good purpose. She could see that underlying his apparently easy compliance was a tacit unwillingness and a negative of assent. He did not resist, but it was from no want of desire to do so. If he quitted Nadine's society and his books to make toffee with Mr. Don, or play at bowls with Tommy, his face showed clearly enough that he now did it reluctantly. Nor as yet had Fanny made much way. The arrant little flirt confessed her failure, but added:

"I could do anything with Master Philip were it not for Mademoiselle Nadine. It is always—don't let Nadine know, don't tell Nadine—if he says or does anything he thinks she would not approve of."

The cruelest part of Mrs. Harpfield's dilemma lay in the fact that she dared not send Nadine away. She knew better than a score of physicians could tell her that a tremendous mental shock, a mortal blow to his dearest hopes might, in his present condition, prove fatal. Long ago she had been warned to avert anything like a catastrophe. There was a certain tenacity in his disposi-

tion that the doctors dreaded more than physical weakness. Thus systematically, and of set purpose, although repressed, idiotised from infancy, when once he had set his affections upon any object, no one ventured to deprive him of it. Mrs. Harpfield remembered the death of his pet dog. If he all but broke his heart over the loss of a favourite poodle, what would be the effect of losing Nadine? Mrs. Harpfield might resent strong passions in others, she could not shut her eyes to the fact of their existence, and the conviction of Philip's love for Nadine brought nothing short of consternation.

There were other sources of uneasiness. Was Winn, too, falling under the same influence? Was he, too, this girl's leal servitor, paying court to herself for purposes of sheer worldly interest? She had never seen the two together, but she knew that he occasionally met Nadine and Philip in their walks, and was looked upon as an acquaintance. Thus much was hearsay, the rest was matter of pure mistrust and suspicion. Nadine was young, distinguished, sparkling. She was inevitably a rival.

Between these two women then, so diametrically opposed in character, what may be called inherited social and ethical standards, and all the manifold qualities of heart and brain that constitute human in-

dividuality, was being fostered a deep, implacable, ever-growing hatred. And reason as we will on the Christian inculcation of mildness and forgiveness, and the moral obligation of living one with another in a spirit of brotherhood, there can be no doubt that the first duty of conscience-endowed beings is to hate.

The worst wrongs under which humanity has groaned—slavery, oppression, torture—are due to this cause, the innate laziness of the bulk of mankind, the general incapacity for hatred. Here and there dislike takes a purely personal form, and those obnoxious to unusually quick temperaments are murderously got rid of. But to hate in the abstract, to hate what does not in the least concern our own immediate selves, to loathe what is vile for vileness' sake, is a rare virtue indeed, and very differently would society be constituted now, had it been commoner.

The ordinary run of non-hating humanity, highly estimable folk in the main have just objectivity enough in them to dislike a sloshy day, or, supposing themselves to be orthodox, the sight of a Methodist chapel. A moderate percentage of our fellow-creatures affect likes and dislikes in politics, it is not the feeblest minority, it is only two or three in a generation who go the length of abhorring an abstract principle.

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What Nadine hated was not the personage called Mary Ann Harpfield, but injustice incarnate.

For her part, Mrs. Harpfield could have forgiven Nadine her spirit, generous bringing up, even her beauty; it was her youth she could not pardon. Little comfort could she find in the fact that to all appearance her rival was wholly indifferent to Winn's admiration. She was tolerably versed in the human heart, she knew the mighty spell wielded over some natures by the unattainable.

Flatterers were not wanting to whisper sweet consolation in her ear.

"On my word," her hairdresser would say, "not a single customer of mine possesses a finer head of hair than yourself. One might swear, standing as I do now, with your back hair in my hand" ("and your face down," was on the man's lips, but was discreetly checked in time), "that you were some miss in your teens."

Mrs. Harpfield, although of a certain age, as our French neighbours say, had as yet no need of fronts, false braids, hair-dye, her unbeautiful, dull brown hair was abundant, and showed no silvery line.

Nor was her dressmaker less encouraging.

"Ah!" sighed the woman of the world, 'a dressmaker's life were child's play indeed, if all their customers were like you. We are

I know, but as God made us ; still, seeing that Providence has sent us stays that fit, I hold it against religion for women to go about like bales of cotton."

Mrs. Harpfield had never belonged to the slender type, and her growing embonpoint was an everlasting thorn in her side. The matter, like so many others that torment us, was one of absolute indifference to every one in the world but herself; her warmest admirers liked her none the less for such comfortable proportions. For all that, she would have given, certainly a year or two of her existence, to be lissome like Fanny Farthing, or statuesquely built, like Nadine. It was one of those storms in a tea-cup women are constantly brewing for themselves. They are ready to eat their hearts out because they have not eyes of the proper colour, a swan-like neck, or small glancing feet. Yet, could they only know it, in all probability, being themselves, life would present itself to them precisely under the same aspect, were they outwardly what they fain would be.

If, however, Mrs. Harpfield occasionally lacked faith in herself, and owned, with deep mortification, that she could not fascinate after the manner of some women, she never lost confidence in circumstances; everything else was favourable. As time wore on, it seemed clearer than ever that Winn could not help himself; he must fall

in love with her, he must ask her to marry him, whether he willed or no. She was his fate, his ruling star. Winn himself ruefully acknowledged the same conviction, or what, perhaps, with him was presentiment.

The very day after that delightful interview with Nadine, whilst yet under the spell of her generous exaltation, to say nothing of her spirit and imposing presence, he was compelled to seek Mrs. Harpfield as a suppliant. The dilemma was odious, altogether abominable, but it had to be out-faced.

He found her in that elegant little boudoir, in which she so admirably acted the part of fine lady. Her piano stood open; truth to tell, she had been practising Czerny's exercises, under the supervision of a music mistress. Pianoforte-playing is not an accomplishment easy to master in middle life, yet as an indispensable part of the makings-up of a gentlewoman, she felt bound to cultivate it. Winn had a good voice, and she was bent upon being able to accompany him.

"I was that moment thinking of you," she began in a kind, almost affectionate voice. "You are working too hard, or," here she perused him narrowly, "you have anxieties, which is it?"

"To be quite open with you—both," Winn said, smiling faintly as he sank into

an easy-chair. There was no fascination about the place; he breathed an atmosphere that was ordinary, humdrum, but comfortable; and to how many has mere personal comfort worn the shape of the arch-tempter?

Winn invariably began by feeling mentally uncomfortable when a guest of Mrs. Harpfield's, and ever ended by a summing-up on the other side. High ideals and lofty standard of conduct were all very well, but most of us are compelled to take life as we find it, and cannot hold aloof from our fellows because they are equally unheroic.

"I am very glad you are so frank, it makes it easier for me to speak out. If, as is naturally the case with a rising professional man, you are pressed for money, let me come to your assistance."

"Indeed you are too good," Winn said, outwardly much more at home with her than with Nadine. "Anticipating your friendliness, I came this very afternoon to ask the favour of a little loan, I should rather say, an advance upon future commissions. I regret to have to confess that I am in great pecuniary straits, just now."

"I shall be delighted to be of use to you," she replied, handing him a cup of tea. The cup was of choicest ware, the tea the best to be had for money, the old silver noggin, bearing a crest and the letter "S.," contained

richest cream. "You shall have a cheque for the amount you may require. And, pray, take care of yourself. You work too hard."

"It is only fair, seeing that hitherto I have been too idle, and, I own, extravagant into the bargain."

"Young men in society are forced into extravagance. It was hardly your own fault."

"You put the case very mildly," Winn said, pleased to be flattered, but inwardly flushing at the tone taken. Mrs. Harpfield certainly made him think less ill of himself, but much worse of human nature in general.

"The plain truth of the matter is that I should never have tried to keep up the traditions of a gentleman. Instead of spending the few hundred pounds my father left me — all my worldly fortune — upon a University education, I should have straightway set up a grocer's shop. By this time I might have owned a pony and gig."

There was a marked emphasis on the word "owned." Winn drove a handsome dog-cart and fine horse, having always a well-dressed man-servant by his side. But such signs of prosperity were affected for appearance sake. A rising young architect and land-surveyor was compelled to cut a good figure.

His tone pleased Mrs. Harpfield no little; every syllable he uttered seemed to put him on a level with herself. Yet a gulf in reality

divided them. If inherited good-breeding may be described as made up of imperceptible little things, the same may be said of that undefinable freemasonry which makes one well-bred person feel immediately at home with another. There were times when she felt as far from understanding Winn as if they belonged to different nationalities, and were unable to communicate with each other in speech. Such sentences as he had just uttered made her forget that she had begun life as a maid-of-all-work, whilst his first experience of the world was Eton.

They chatted for some time, and the cloud of care vanished from his brow as Mrs. Harpfield sat down to her writing-table. Nadine's image was as vivid as ever. He would have given worlds to unmake this scene; but, when a man is dunned by his creditors, heavenly visions move faintly by comparison to the sight of a cheque-book.

"Will a hundred pounds do?" Mrs. Harpfield asked, looking over her shoulder.

"You are too generous. I should hardly have had courage to ask for the half."

She made no reply, but signed her name with the usual flourish. Then rising, with a smile that was meant to be encouraging but was palpably triumphant, she handed him the cheque.

Mrs. Harpfield's hands, on which glittered brand-new costly diamond rings, were not

ivory-white and soft as velvet, although they did not too openly betray the toil of early days. Could Winn well help raising the fingers of his benefactress to his lips? As he did so, a look of unwonted feminineness and almost melting emotion stole over her face. She did not blush; hers was the kind of complexion that could not show such an exquisite rejuvenation. But her eyes brightened, lighting up the sallow features. The whole woman was transformed. To her disappointment he immediately rose to go, his manner as collected, as business-like as ever; not a glow of feeling in his look, not a sign of agitation in his manner. Nothing disconcerts a woman in love more than such a disillusion. To feel her whole existence altered by a kiss, a whispered word, a tender look, and the next moment to find her lover coolly turning to a newspaper, or lighting a cigar!

Winn, after a word more of thanks, suddenly seemed to remember something he had to say.

"By the way," he began, with affected carelessness. What would he have given to be quit of this part of his errand? "Philip seems to be improving. I have been struck by the intelligence of his remarks lately."

"Really?" Mrs. Harpfield replied, biting and ironic. "Has he learned to know what o'clock it is, or how many months there are in the year?"

Her manner had changed so entirely that already his resolution to speak out was waxing feeble. Moreover, he felt that he had no right to affront her with that cheque in his pocket.

"I certainly think that shyness and nervousness have a good deal to do with his apparent incapacity," he went on, trying to fulfil his promise to Nadine, or at least to be able to say that he had tried to do so, at the same time determined to give no umbrage. "But the timidity will wear off when he mixes with other boys"—he made a great effort to get out the rest of his sentence—"when he goes to school, as I suppose he will do ere long."

She laughed then, a little laugh that grated harshly on his ears.

"I have serious thoughts of sending him to the parish infant school," she replied. "Must you really go now? Don't forget that I am always at home on Sunday evenings."

Winn was not to leave without being reminded of his indebtedness. Mrs. Harpfield could be generous, but her generosity lacked the fine quality that cancels obligation beforehand. The gist of conferring a favour, in her eyes, lay in the hold it gives you over the recipient. Anxious as she was to please him and seem altogether winning in his eyes, one little bit of ill-breeding would come out.

"I hope you won't stay away till you

want another hundred pounds," she laughed. "Bring Mr. Greenbank next Sunday evening. I will give you a larded guinea-fowl for supper."

"As if we wanted such an inducement?"

"The more inducement one offers one's friends to visit us the better," was the reply.

Then Winn went, overjoyed at the thought of the cheque in his pocket, but mortified beyond endurance at the debt thereby incurred, and at the report he should have to give to Nadine. Is there not some foundation for the mythic demons of good and evil supposed to follow each human being through the path of destiny? Winn was passionately desirous of acting in concert with Nadine—not perhaps in reality that he had Philip's welfare greatly at heart, but in order to win her approbation—his good genius impelled him towards the fulfilment of her mandates. Pulling the other way, were evil influences, motives, and desires, that seemed to enmesh and entangle him past all hope of extrication. The penalty of imprudence and folly is that they cut us off from what in reality we care most about. We have imprudently and foolishly sacrificed the greater good to the lesser—the celestial crown to the muck-rake of Bunyan's pilgrim—finding it out too late. In securing Mrs. Harpfield for his ally, he found temporary ease of mind and relief from diffi-

culties ; but at what a cost ! He felt already that he had lost Nadine. She watched eagerly for him in her walks, and a day or two after this interview they met. He was alone, and had no excuse for avoiding her ; his ill-concealed reluctance to begin a conversation, told her all.

"You have spoken to Mrs. Harpfield about Philip ?" she asked.

"I have."

"And you can do nothing — I see it in your face."

"Nothing."

"Look here !" she cried, eagerly, bringing from her pocket a bundle of Philip's mathematical papers, "I may not be much longer with the poor boy, I only stay on till I am driven away for his sake. But will not you, will no one take up his cause ? Philip studies Euclid with me in secret, these papers are legal proofs of his mental capacity ; surely there is some one who will see justice done to him ? Public opinion, the laws of your country, must be brought to bear upon Mrs. Harpfield. She must not, shall not, carry out her wicked intention of shutting him up as an idiot all his life."

Winn glanced at the papers. Yes, there was proof here, not only of average intellect, but of a mathematical aptitude quite remarkable in an uneducated invalid boy of fifteen.

"What can I do, a woman, a foreigner,

and alone?" Nadine continued, in the same voice of vehement appeal. "Yet I am his only friend. It is monstrous, it is inhuman, thus to sit by and let a crime worse than murder be deliberately perpetrated before one's eyes."

"I am very sorry," began Winn.

"To be very sorry is no man's reply, not the answer of one who has limbs, a will, an intellect at his disposal. It is because people have only been very sorry that there is still so much injustice in the world. But you can help Philip if you will. And your friend," here Nadine's voice had a touch of contempt in it, "Mr. Greenbank—he is doubtless very sorry too. Why do not you two join with me in openly protesting against this infamous conspiracy? We would resort to force, to the law, and compel Mrs. Harpfield, this vampire in woman's shape, to give up her prey."

"Let me be entirely candid with you," Winn said, unable any longer to bear these reproaches. "It is impossible for me to do what you propose, for the painful reason that I am under very great obligations to Mrs. Harpfield. I owe her money."

Nadine did not answer a word. She drew the papers from his hands with a look of helplessness. His youth, his frankness, his winning manner had inspired confidence in the beginning. This explanation scattered all the hopes centred in him to the winds.

"Perhaps I might be of some use at some future time," he began.

"There is no future in such a case," she broke in, bitterly, "only the present moment is ours. Every day allowed to slip by renders the task of interfering more difficult. But of what good to talk any longer, since you can do nothing?"

She turned away from him in a mood of cruel disenchantment, but his own feelings were much harder to bear. If she had lost that beautiful faith in others which makes existence so easy in youth, he had lost faith in himself, which is infinitely more precious.

He felt that their ways parted here; she was following the broad, straight road of honour and integrity, his led through tortuous paths and many a pitfall. Only a day or two before, and friendship, even affectionate understanding, seemed possible. Now they were once more strangers.

CHAPTER X.

ACTING A DOUBLE PART.

COULD any one, could even Nadine know what was passing in Philip's mind? Candour was hardly to be expected from such a bringing up, and whilst Mrs. Harpfield assumed

his mental incapacity, and Nadine took for granted that he was in full possession of his faculties, neither could nicely measure the difference between him and other boys of the same age. A certain difference existed, partly due to inherited physical weakness, partly, to education; in nothing was this so evident as in his reluctance to unbosom himself. By little and little Nadine had won his confidence, but hardly a day passed without showing how much remained to be done. If Mrs. Harpfield kept incessant watch over her charge, equally unremitting was Nadine's surveillance. Idle to do battle for his bodily freedom if the spiritual part of him were allowed to escape her! Mrs. Harpfield had done her best to enervate her victim in body as well as in mind, was she to finish her work by ruining his soul?

On these bright spring days Philip was a good deal out of doors, and for the first time in his life was permitted to take short walks alone. The sense of independence delighted him beyond measure; he would roam from pightle to pightle—thus are enclosed meadows called in these parts—and from field to field, bringing home wild flowers, shells and mosses, high spirits, and bright healthful looks. Nothing, indeed, seemed to have done more for him than the newly acquired privilege of solitude. Mrs. Harp-

field had frowned and remonstrated in the first instance, but as the lad showed no inclination to wander far from home, and as thus occupied he gave no trouble, she finally let Nadine have her way. There were advantages, too, in the new plan. If Philip forgot the dinner or tea hour, Fanny Farthing was despatched to seek him, and they would return chatting gaily as if the best of friends. He was less constantly with Nadine, and anything that kept the pair apart was welcomed.

One sweet spring evening, when the hedges showed budding green and the earth seemed a haunt of birds and flowers, with no room left for turbulent human passions, or evil in any shape, Nadine went out in search of Philip herself.

She knew his favourite spot, a vast fallow field bordered by lofty hedges and containing two fairy spots, at one end a little pool, haunt of the yellow-hammer and kingfisher, in the centre a green hollow, in which quite a little colony of the more timid birds, animals, and insects had their abode, and flowers flourished seldom found elsewhere. Philip called this oasis, amid acres of fallow, his island, and would often say, if it were his very own he should want nothing else. It was something to have it all to himself. Nadine had crossed the field and reached the edge of the dell

when she heard several voices that she knew: Philip's, Fanny's shrill treble, and a third, the soft, mellow, to her ear, unspeakably repellent tones of Mr. Greenbank. The three were in the hollow, and something had greatly excited their hilarity.

"Come," cried Mr. Greenbank, "is that the way you set about winning a wager, Philip, and such a wager, too? It would be unfair of me to win it from you, try again."

There was the sound of a click, and something fell; Nadine gathered that the game consisted of aiming with pebbles at an improvised target.

"Worse than ever; but Fanny will give you another chance—won't you, Fanny? You must remember he is no sharpshooter."

"One more, and only one," Fanny replied. Again Nadine heard the same sound, the impact of an object against a hard surface. Then followed loud cheering and laughter.

"Hit, by Jove!" shouted Mr. Greenbank. "It is wonderful how some wagers will sharpen our eyes. Now, youngster, never mind Fanny's screams and blushes. The kiss is honestly yours, and if you cannot get it by fair means, it shall be yours by foul."

Then followed screams from Fanny, a rushing hither and thither, with peals of laughter.

"Fanny, Fanny, you shall not get off. Stop her, Mr. Greenbank, please."

It was Philip's voice Nadine heard, now pitched to a shrill key, but she could listen no longer. Heart-sick, soul-sick, she hastened homewards. It was as she feared: Philip had secrets from her, and a part of Mrs. Harpfield's deep scheme was to win him from her by counter influences. The boy was not only to be ruined in a worldly point of view, cheated of his property and heritage, not only little by little was his intelligence to be filched from him, but he was also to be robbed of the first prerogative of a rational being, the power to discern right from wrong.

That evening Mrs. Harpfield was also to be perturbed and shocked.

"I will tell you what it is," Mr. Greenbank said, running his fingers through his hair in order to show his diamond ring. "That youngster will give us some trouble before we have done. He is not going to be the dear little nonentity we have hitherto set him down for."

The familiar "we" might have suggested an intimacy out of the ordinary way, perhaps, indeed, compromising to the lady's good name, but all who knew her well, and even physiognomists unacquainted with her past history, could have staked their existence to the contrary.

Women like Mary Ann Harpfield are far too deep to put themselves in any man's power; to speak paradoxically, they are too egotistical not to be virtuous. Their schemes

and devices may fail, they may have to appear before the bar of public opinion, reputation steps in, virtue pleads their cause, and they are saved! The pair were exceedingly useful to each other, and nothing like sentiment had ever entered into the compact. Mr. Greenbank was educated, possessed a considerable knowledge of business, and was thoroughly versed in the world. He could help his friend out of many an intricacy, whilst her part was far easier. When he wanted a little money, he had only to notify the fact, thus they never remained in each other's debt.

He now drew from his pocket the half of a leaf torn out of a copy-book. It was an algebraical problem quite correctly worked out and signed as if in triumph, "Philip Summerhill."

"I wanted a pipe-light when out with Philip this afternoon, and he gave me this bit of paper. Now a lad who can do so well in algebra at fifteen, ought to go to Cambridge and become a senior wrangler. My dear Polly, you will have to give up the game."

Mr. Greenbank's first acquaintance with the magnificent personage now sitting before him dressed in velvet, fastened by a diamond brooch, had begun twenty-five years ago. The scullery-maid of former days was still Polly to him when they were alone.

"What are you talking about?" Mrs.

Harpfield began, in short, angry tones. "Are the best years of my existence to be thrown away for the sake of a paltry hundred a year? You know how the will runs. When Philip is twenty-one, I retire with that miserly pension."

"Take into account the percentage paid for years in advance," was the cynical remark.

"I shall send Nadine away; she is at the bottom of all the mischief. Philip won't break his heart, not he; besides, I have an idea." Then Mrs. Harpfield stopped short, evidently not prepared to confide even in her confidant as yet.

"Unfortunately, every man, woman, and child has an idea," pursued Greenbank. He did not in reality care much about what became of Philip Summerhill; and he was reckless and sadly lax in principle. But he was no villain by profession, rather an amateur in the art. It seemed to him, moreover, that Mrs. Harpfield had already made capital enough out of her charge. He ran over the sum-total of her investments in his mind, and he said to himself that any woman beginning life as a kitchen-maid ought to think herself rich with five thousand pounds.

"And my impression is that Philip will soon find out everything—if he has not done so already—that he has ideas of his own. No, Polly, take my advice, and give up the game. Let the poor little bird fly when once he feels his wings."

Mrs. Harpfield's face became a veritable thunder-cloud.

"The boy is really incapable ; of what use to argue as if it were otherwise ? He may have a talent for this, that, or the other, but he has no common sense, and will never be able to manage for himself. There the matter ends. But Mademoiselle Nadine must go."

"Having quite cured the poor boy of his fainting fits ?"

"Say epileptic and have done with it. What good can come of perpetually mincing matters ? Philip may be well for a month or a year, but he can never get over this weakness ; it is impossible."

"Then, my dear Polly, having settled to your entire satisfaction that the boy is to remain an idiot for the rest of his days, let us pass to the next motion of the house. Have you seen Winn lately ?"

"He was here yesterday. I almost wish now you had never introduced your friend to me," Mrs. Harpfield replied, still out of temper with Greenbank—he was the bearer of evil news. "I fear Mr. Francis Winn is a weather-cock blown by every wind."

"The strongest wind keeps the weather-cock in its place. Don't give him up. He will not always be an insignificant, struggling, professional man, mark my words."

"He hovers about that little Russian like a moth round a candle."

"You say that you are going to put out the flame, so all danger will soon be over in that quarter."

"Will Mr. Winn take his position in society here?"

"Undoubtedly, and his wife, whoever she might be, would be received also. What he wants is money."

"I am not sure that I have done well to settle down in this place, and spend so much upon improvements," Mrs. Harpfield said, doubtfully, "only the cheapness tempted me, and a country life is better for Philip."

"It will be a beautiful place in time, and you will be very happy here—you two, I mean," Greenbank replied, meaningly.

"I don't believe that Mr. Winn has any intention of marrying, much less that he has fallen in love" — "with me," Mrs. Harpfield was on the point of saying, but left the rest to her companion's conjecture.

"Pooh, pooh, pooh! To listen to you, Polly, one might swear you were a girl in your teens. What have intentions of falling in love to do with ninety-nine marriages out of a hundred? Nothing whatever. A man marries because he can't help himself, and that is perhaps as good a reason and as solid a basis of happiness as another. Winn will propose to you just because a time is coming when it will be impossible for him to do otherwise."

"You are very complimentary."

"What good in the name of common sense would compliments do you? Facts at our time of life are more to the point. You wish to take rank as the wife of a gentleman; Winn desires to better his circumstances. Could any concatenation of events make two individuals more necessary to each other? I see it as clearly as the hands of your time-piece. You are becoming more necessary to Winn every day. You see nobody has any money just now. These county gentlemen employing him to value land or supervise untenanted farms, are genteel paupers. Their incomes have gone down to zero, and how can they pay him anything? And as to architecture, well, an architect is about as much needed here as among Bedouin Arabs. No, Winn's only salvation lies in a wealthy marriage."

All this time Mrs. Harpfield was resenting these worldly counsels as much as if she had been an unsophisticated maiden fresh from school. Versed as was Greenbank in human nature, he never suspected the passion underlying that cold, matter-of-fact exterior. Her ambition he fully measured; he never guessed that she wanted to marry Winn because she loved him.

After this confabulation the pair were served with one of those finished little repasts Mrs. Harpfield flattered herself that no one

could appreciate but herself. The world in general, she reasoned, possessed about as much gastronomic judgment as the least fastidious of four-footed creatures; superlative dishes, like brilliant destinies, are for the chosen few.

Holding, as she did, doctrines of absolute equality, regarding social grades and distinctions as of the devil's own making, Mrs. Harpfield yet played the part of a very autocrat in her home. To-night, for instance, not only was Fanny in attendance—automatic, discreet, subservient—the very model of a parlour-maid, but Tommy also—the Mr. Pakeman of the ball-room, wearing his Sunday clothes—helped her to wait.

Had the lady presiding at the table belonged to an elevated rank of society, she could not more haughtily have commanded the subordinates, or shown herself more distant and exacting. But which of us is logical in carrying out our principles? That there should seem a gulf impassable between herself and the ladies Winn met in society was monstrous; for all that, she took great care to show Fanny and Tommy that such a gulf really existed between them and their mistress.

CHAPTER XI.

PLOTS AND COUNTERPLOTS.

FEW of us, fortunately, have witnessed the awful spectacle of slow poisoning ; have been condemned to watch, in passive horror, the sight of some one in buoyant health and spirits being insidiously wasted to death by a monster in human shape, prototype of the dreaded dipsas of legend.

But if such an experience be harrowing and heart-breaking, is there not one even more so ? The poisoner, bent on destroying life, brings his fiendish skill to bear on the body only ; enough for him that, day by day, a certain amount of vital energy is forfeited, the hold on life grows feebler, the span of his victim's earthly career is shortened. Of deeper dye still is the guilt of the moral murderer ; more agonising the conviction of the outsider that, little by little, venom is infused into a pure and artless nature, candid feelings and pure impulses are warped, a promising character is made retrograde and capable of vileness. The painful fact now dawned upon Nadine that malignant influences were at work, and that Philip was being slowly, but surely, estranged from her. He was as sedulous a student as ever, but,

when the stolen lessons in Euclid and algebra were over, he showed no desire to remain with his teacher. The clinging affectionateness and artless confidence of former days were gone. Sometimes she fancied that he even shrank from her, as if her presence could do him harm; again and again she would look up from her book, to find his large, wistful eyes fastened upon her, as much as to say, "Is it true? Are you in reality not the Nadine you appear to be—my true friend—but a person to be feared, mistrusted, hated?"

What was the glamour? There seemed no means of finding out. If she put a fond, insinuating question, he turned it off, or reddening and tearful, hurried out of the room, to take refuge in the society of Fanny Farthing and Tommy Pakeman. The poison worked two ways: it not only destroyed his mental appetite for what was sweet and wholesome, it vitiated his taste, and imparted a craving for unhealthy stimulants.

It was now the season of the budding leaf, and Philip's long-cherished desire of a sail on the river was to be gratified. Mrs. Harpfield seemed ready to humour all his whims now; never had Nadine seen her so compliant and unsuspecting. She had even consented to Winn's proposal that Nadine should accompany them.

"You say she is going to leave you very

soon," he said, with studied carelessness. "It seems a pity she should leave this part of the world without seeing something of it. When *you* favour me with your company," he added, significantly, "I hope no third person will be allowed to spoil our tête-à-tête."

"Not even Mr. Greenbank?" she asked, almost wild with delight.

Winn had been singularly unloverlike lately; all at once his indifference seemed changed to an intense desire to please her, and make patent his devotion.

He said nothing in reply to this appeal, but looked at her long and reproachfully. Mrs. Harpfield smiled, coquetted, made excuse, finally acquiescing in the fond assurance that the projected trip would seal her fate.

Meantime, on a soft April afternoon, Winn fetched Nadine and Philip in his smart dog-cart, and they drove quickly to the old-world town and the quays. It was one of those days when the heavens showed neither blue sky nor cloud-land apart, but the two combined, a pearly, pale violet veil, with only mild sunshine; no summer splendour so restful, so poetic.

Between earth and heaven the skylarks made music; they seemed to have taken possession of the empyrean, making it ring with their jubilant hallelujahs, reminding care-laden mortals that another miracle had

been wrought, once more a world re-created, spring had come!

If the skies were neutral tinted, no jewels could be more brilliant than the fields and meadows. Now the happy holiday-makers flashed by a sweep of dazzling buttercups, now by stretches of young wheat, of richer, purer green than even the freshly burgeoned foliage of the hedgerows. As yet the elm-trees showed their light tassels of purple only, and in beautiful contrast to the bright green leaves was the dark rich pencilling of the bare branches.

They traversed the ancient capital of eastern England, city of ornate church turrets and elaborately carved houses of mediæval burghers, hardly surpassed in Nuremburg, and the bustling docks. Then what a scene of loveliness was that broad, transparent river! To-day the very genius of peace and solitude brooded over the place. The pleasure-steamers and skiffs plying between the quays and river's mouth throughout the summer, were not yet running, no picnic-parties made their wood fire under the trees, no youthful bathers disported themselves in remote creeks; they had mossy knolls and coppice woods reflected in the blue mirror of the waters, all to themselves.

"We have plenty of time for our sail, so had better go ashore and have tea before

the air is too fresh," Winn said. "Come, Philip, will you help our boatman here to make a fire and boil the kettle?"

The boy assented eagerly. The boat's course was steered towards a lovely monticule with sunny slopes and bending trees, and Winn led the way to a deserted restaurant, a tiny hut roofed with furze-bushes, and having seats and a table for the convenience of picnickers. He opened his basket, displaying cakes, fruit, and sweetmeats. Never had Philip been so fêted before.

"It was kind of you to make these preparations for us," Nadine said, touched by his liberality; "we are not accustomed to such dainty fare," she added, bitterly sarcastic as she thought of the miserly board spread for the young heir at home.

"It is shameful that you should not both have the very best; it is his due and your desert, to say the least of it," he said, his entire manner changing. The gay, genial host, bent on making his entertainment perfect, had become, all on a sudden, sinister, gloomy, aggressive; his frank, pleasant face wore the dark look of a conspirator.

"Let me out with the truth," he began; "this sail and the river picnic were connived at in order to get an interview with you. We have no spies, no listeners here; but when are we safe for five minutes within easy reach of Reedmere Hall? Fortunately

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I have succeeded in disarming suspicion ; to-day, at least, we are secure."

Nadine, with skilful fingers, was spreading their woodland table, decorating the dishes with sprays of fern and harebell, giving the whole an appearance of a fairy banquet.

"Do listen to me," he said, almost brusquely ; "I have something very serious to say to you, and our time is short. Just because I want Philip and my man yonder to be slow over their kettle-boiling, they are sure to be brisk. It is as you said from the first, and that poor boy yonder is the victim of most abominable scheming. Nor do the machinations of these people end here. You also they will harm if they can."

"What harm can they do me ?"

"They have already succeeded in poisoning Philip's mind against you. Don't you see how differently he behaves ? And the other day he let me into the secret of the change. 'Do you know,' he asked me, with the innocence of a child of five, 'Nadine is not what I took her to be ? She is my enemy instead of being my friend.' 'How so ?' I asked. Shall I repeat the tissue of absurdities he has been persuaded to believe in ? I don't think that any good would come of it, and you would only be disappointed in your protégé."

"I would much rather know the truth," Nadine said.

"Then it is this: Philip is being perpetually dosed with horrible stories about dynamiters and Nihilists. Pray don't think that I am without sympathy for the wrongs of your country-people, or that I cannot distinguish between justifiable protest and anarchical rebellion. He is made to believe that you would never be so far away from home and alone, were you not a conspirator, in league with desperate fellow-anarchists, only awaiting your opportunity to show your true character. The notion has even been put into his mind, that unless you are speedily got rid of, your presence may prove damaging to himself. Could devilish ingenuity go farther?"

"Poor, poor Philip!"

"Poor, poor Nadine! Never was devotion so disinterested worse rewarded. You have healed the boy, both in body and mind, and this is your payment. You see, of course, the motive. You must be got rid of at any price because you are felt to be Philip's champion; they know——"

"They? It is Mrs. Harpfield, and Mrs. Harpfield alone, who is guilty," Nadine cried.

Winn coloured and corrected himself. "Mrs. Harpfield knows that Philip could never have borne the parting with you had things been left as they were, had he remained passionately devoted to you, I mean. The chagrin might kill him, and it would

never do to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. So, by little and little, the poor boy has been made to feel that you are capable of anything—of blowing up the town-hall here and Reedmere Hall—being, in consequence, surrounded with police—of trying different poisons upon him; you smile incredulously, but nothing is too preposterous to believe of these people—this woman. You see, the stakes are heavy. I have taken the trouble to ascertain the amount of Philip's fortune. At twenty-one he should come into possession of thirty or forty thousand pounds."

Nadine listened with almost an impersonal sorrow and dismay in her face. Philip's recalcitrant feeling only pained her for his own sake, she no more feared Mrs. Harpfield than her helpless ward.

"Not a penny of his lawful heritage will ever be really his," Winn continued; "and seeing the impressionableness of his nature, you and I, or any other well-wishers, are utterly powerless to help him. The game is in Mrs. Harpfield's own hands, and she will play it out. What we have to provide for is our own safety. Look straight before you; do you see in the far distance a white speck only just visible on the horizon?"

"A ship's sail? Yes, I see it quite clearly."

"It is a sailing vessel, in all probability bound for the North, perhaps a whaler off

to Greenland. I assure you I would at this moment thankfully exchange my lot for that of a common tar on board yon skipper. You belong to a country where many a hapless doomed one feels as I do; he sees the prison cell, the hangman's rope, powerless to escape them; had he only been born to some other destiny, to be careless and free!"

"You are thinking of your obligations to Mrs. Harpfield, but surely they are not very serious as yet," Nadine said, feeling more sympathy for him than she had ever done before. Then she glanced at him sharply, and asked, with the naïve frankness of a woman accustomed to regard human relations from the larger and nobler standpoint:

"You have not asked her to marry you?"

"Heaven be praised, no; but I feel it, I know it—she is my evil destiny. You may not believe in portents or prognostics, certain inner promptings, secret bodements of harm and misfortune you cannot deny. Is not the fact of holding intercourse with the perverted and the guilty, in itself a sure precursor of ill? And when once a man's foot is in the toils, useless for him to struggle, no angler's prey feebler than he! I see my awful position, but I cannot extricate myself."

"Unless you were to leave the place.

Why not make up your mind to do that?" asked Nadine, gently.

"Why not, indeed? Because if cowardly to remain, it were more cowardly still to run away. You must know, I owe this woman money. If I were to go away, the step must be taken furtively; I should be acting the part of a criminal defalcator. And if I stay——"

He turned his pale face towards her, and added in a voice more desperately eager than ever:

"If I stay, I shall be as some poor wretch plunged chin-deep in hell fire, while far off, he catches sight of the paradise he once lived near, of an angelic vision that once smiled upon him. Nadine, you are a noble woman, and I am hardly worthy to be your lackey. Be sorry for me. Say that you would have helped me if you could."

"Oh," she said, passionately persuasive, feeling that she was Philip's advocate here as well as Winn's, "do not talk of hell or paradise, but of this poor human life which we are bound to make honest and true. Hold aloof from Mrs. Harpfield, work hard and repay her loans, then—who knows?—perhaps between us, we two can devise some means of rescuing Philip."

He looked doubtful.

"Shall I tell you what I believe to be the only plan of saving him? We must

imitate sailors in a storm who throw their treasure overboard. Why not smuggle the boy away? He would forfeit his money, but regain his freedom."

"I had thought of that too. The enterprise is not perhaps superhuman, and on Philip's attaining his majority, he could come forward and claim his heritage. But there are serious obstacles. His character offers one."

"And the law of the land forbids kidnapping. Not that I would not run all risks at a hint from you. We have only to petition for another sail on the river, a day's picnic; meantime, of the dozens of steamers sailing from Harwich for foreign parts, we could choose that going farthest. More hazardous escapes have been successfully planned."

"It is a pleasant dream. I wish it could be realised, for Philip's sake."

"Say, for mine also! If I saw the faintest chance of my future life being in some way or other mixed up with yours, I should have strength to break these fetters. You are going away, we shall in all probability never meet again; it really doesn't matter a straw what becomes of me."

Nadine listened with a sorrowful, far-off look. Winn's confidence awakened no sense of triumph, only the painful thought that she could save him if she esteemed her own life as lightly.

"Why should we not do this—snatch

the poor boy from the devil's clutches?" he cried, eagerly. "I am a clever schemer; I would contrive everything so skilfully, that failure would be next to impossible. And the world is wide; bread is easily gained in new cities; talents like yours find a market everywhere, indeed there are no impossibilities. You have only to say the word, and I will plan our flight."

"Dreams, dreams," Nadine said, unable to resist a smile, although sad at heart. "We will join Philip now. At any rate we are in paradise this afternoon."

"You will let me see you again before you leave Reedmere Hall, and you will be on your guard? There is mischief in the air," Winn said, in a low voice, as they walked towards the kettle-boilers.

"Certainly I will see you again, unless I am sent off at a moment's notice."

"And you will try and think kindly of me, whatever happens, for Philip's sake."

"I promise that too. But why such a proviso? Whatever happens, you are a man; your fate is in your own hands."

"A man is hardly master of himself when his mind is set upon the unattainable," Winn replied, passionately. "From the first moment I saw you I felt that I should never really care for any other woman, and now I see it; except in a certain sisterly fashion you can never care for me."

And again he was answered by a look only. Nadine's face told him that all he had said was but too true.

"The kettle is bubbling. Oh, Mr. Winn, where did you get those wonderful cakes?" cried Philip, bounding towards them in the highest spirits. He placed a hand caressingly within the arm of each, and looked from one to the other, all frankness, gaiety, and affection. The evil spell had ceased to work. He felt himself among friends, and was happy.

How swiftly the enchanted moments fled by! As they made this riverside repast, from time to time talk and laughter ceased at the magic voice of the cuckoo. Is it a call of welcome or promise? Does the cuckoo exuberate over the breaking up of icy winter, or prophet-like rejoice in the

fulness of summer glory to come? Deep meaning seems to vibrate in that clear, penetrating note, perhaps to be found out by each listener for himself.

With artless unaffected delight, young and old, care-laden and buoyant, all of us listen to the Ariel of the spring; but if its song charms in bare, unpoetic places, how much more does it seem to belong to spots as fairy-like as Prospero's island?

No sweeter place could well be found than this wooded hill, almost islanded from the

shore; above the beautiful Orwell, cornfields and meadows; on either side, thick woods of tender green, whilst far away a broad silvery line marked where the river flowed towards the sea.

But these happy holiday-makers had two worlds to gaze upon instead of one. The limpidity of the water and the transparency of the atmosphere made a second landscape, trees, grassy knolls, and coast line reflected in the smooth gliding waves. All was very still; only the cuckoo's voice, clear and sonorous as a bell, broke the stillness, whilst the earth, now a flower-garden from end to end, breathed fragrance.

"You are very happy to-day, Philip," Nadine said, taking the boy's hand, and looking into his eyes. "You will not soon forget this picnic with us by the river?"

"Never," he replied, and overcome with sudden emotion, he held her hand to his cheek, fondling it.

"Don't let any one make you believe that I am not your friend, or that I should ever do anything to make you ashamed of me," she added.

He turned away his face to hide the blush he could not stay.

"I won't believe any more what they say, I won't, indeed," he murmured.

"And you will try to be honest and true, to behave like a man when I am away?"

"Oh," he cried, almost on the point of tears, "why don't we go somewhere together, you, Mr. Winn, and I?"

"That would not be very easy now; but when you are six years older—I am perpetually reminding you of it—you will be able to go where you like."

"Not whilst I am with Harpie."

The ill-omened name, dropped so resignedly from the boy's lips, once more broke the spell of that enchanted afternoon. The cuckoo's note rang through the woodland still, the dream-world showed bright and luminous beneath the waves, glowing and sun-bright as the landscape above, yet the witchery of the place and the hour were gone! So ever and ever does the shadow of evil dog our paths, darkening our flowery ways, sobering our gladdest hour.

Perhaps the only consolation for this thought is that unless evil were present with us, and made itself felt as a personal foe to be wrestled with and overcome, we should live lazily and pleasantly, not concerning ourselves whether angelic goodness ultimately prevail over devildom or no.

CHAPTER XII.

THE VISION.

ABOUT this time all Europe shuddered at one of the most awful retributive crimes recorded in history. On a bright spring day, telegraph wires flashed the tidings from end to end of the civilised globe. The autocrat of the modern world, the absolute master of millions upon millions of men, the heir of despots, spoliators, liberticides—Alexander II., Czar of all the Russias—had met his threatened doom at last.

The popular and natural feeling upon such occasions is one of simple abhorrence to the unthinking. Only one consolation offers itself, namely, that the perpetrators of the deed await, in close-barred cells, speedy shrift and the halter. But the unbiassed, impersonal student of history views the matter in quite a different spirit. His pity is divided between the victim of inherited hatreds and the countless multitude of his subjects, victims of inherited wrongs. Horrible as is the story and the moral lesson not taken to heart as yet, it must be accepted as the inevitable sequence of foregone events. If dynasties sow the storm, shall they not reap the whirlwind? Bloodshed, oppression, tyranny—shall they engender peace,

justice, and loving-kindness? To the descendant of the destroyers of Polish liberty, had not the vast Russian nation, as one man, again and again uttered the warning of the French revolutionary: "Thy crime is to be Czar!"

Mrs. Harpfield always read her newspaper and discussed politics, home and foreign, with Mr. Greenbank and Mr. Don. She flattered herself, and not without good cause, that few ladies mixing in society possessed more knowledge of what was going on than herself. And these political discussions were prepared for beforehand by unsparing reference to dictionaries, maps, and encyclopædias; in fact, she seemed to be learning a new language. The time was not far off when she hoped, as Winn's wife, to quit for ever the atmosphere of the kitchen for that of the drawing-room. Too much pains could not be taken to fit herself for the change.

Mr. Greenbank had brought the news of the Emperor's assassination. Mischief always exhilarated him, and gave him something to do. Whenever the papers appeared full of some extraordinary crime or calamity, he acted the part of courier extraordinary, retailing the news in remote farmhouses, doing his twenty miles a day on foot in order to enlighten acquaintances on the latest horror. His self-constituted mission was certainly a charitable one. The daily existence of country folks in such out-of-the-way places is so dull, the pulse

beats so slowly there, that, but for an occasional catastrophe, made real to them by Mr. Greenbank's vivid descriptions, torpor would degenerate into inanition.

To-day, as he read the Russian news from beginning to end, he noticed a strange look in his listener's face. Mrs. Harpfield was outwardly impassable; she could grow dark with anger or beam with delight, but showed none of those intermediate shades of expression we see in others. No thunderclouds, no sunbeam were now visible, only a cold light glittered in her eyes.

"Is that all?" she asked.

"Let me see—no, here is another paragraph, wired from St. Petersburg also. Humph! You had better not show this to your little Russian."

Then he read as follows: "It is said that many young ladies of noble family have enrolled themselves among the Nihilists, and that especially among the women students of medicine, these revolutionary doctrines find supporters and propagandists."

She rang the bell.

"I will send for Philip," she said. "He shall hear every word about this affair. Perhaps he will feel somewhat differently towards Nadine afterwards."

"Oh! is that worth while? She is going away, and has been good to the little fellow. Why poison his mind against her?"

"He ought to know the truth," Mrs. Harpfield said. "I shall get rid of Nadine at once. How do we know that she is not a Nihilist with the rest?"

"Tut-tut-tut, my dear friend! What ideas you get in your head! Well, expound to your pupil what political notions you please; I do not suppose for a moment that they will penetrate farther than the epidermis."

He took jesting leave, and, soon after, Philip dashed in, looking so full of life and spirit that Mrs. Harpfield gazed in wonder. The physical improvement of the last few months was little short of miraculous, and he had gained mental alertness and a habit of self-dependence in almost equal degree. But the undefined dawning of this new self-will, individuality—call it by what name we please—and the consciousness that, sooner or later, this new self would clash with Mrs. Harpfield's, made the boy disingenuous and suspicious of evil. He yet felt, in a dim, undefined way, that his nurse wished him to remain the Philip of former days—submissive, colourless, limber as a withy, in her hands. He had of late begun to act a part, repressing before her those newly-awakened energies and faculties which made existence all looking forward.

"Sit down, Philip," she said. "I want to read something to you."

Was there no good angel to whisper a re-

monstrance in her ear, no inner voice to bid her stay from the cruel purpose? She knew well enough that Philip was so happy just now because he had recovered faith in Nadine. The first dose of poison had lost effect, his mind had recovered its healthy tone. Could any being endowed with conscience — any woman — recommence the invidious process?

"Listen," she began, as she took up the newspaper. "When I have done you will not, perhaps, wonder that I seem to act harshly towards Nadine. She must no longer stay under this roof. Who knows that she is not an accomplice of these bloodthirsty assassins?"

"I don't want to hear anything about them," Philip murmured, in an imploring voice. "You know, Harpie, I hate to hear of murders; and," he added, with trembling lips and filling eyes, "I am sure Nadine would never approve of wickedness."

It was characteristic of Mrs. Harpfield that she never spoke roughly or with apparent unkindness to her charge. Her weapons were of keener edge.

"Nonsense, my dear boy!" she went on, laying a caressing hand about his shoulders. "You are no longer a baby. You ought to know what is going on in the world. Just listen to this account of the assassination of the Czar of Russia, and of the part played by women doctors like Nadine in the horrible conspiracy. I do not say that she has any-

thing to do with it ; what I say is that, in countenancing her, I shall seem to approve of a band of murderers. Sooner or later, as you know, she must have gone ; and now it must be at once."

The conviction that he was to be separated from Nadine came as a thunder-clap, but the news that a mighty European sovereign had been ruthlessly murdered by his subjects affected Philip no more than an ordinary page of history.

Like many a sensitive, delicate lad, he had an innate horror of bloodshed. His was by no means a cowardly temperament—quite the reverse ; but even the hand-to-hand combats detailed so poetically by Homer and Virgil repelled him, much more so the bald account of Waterloo and Trafalgar. When, therefore, Mrs. Harpfield began to read the hateful chronicle, in hard, clear, metallic tones, he tried not to listen ; he would have stopped his ears had he dared. But the hateful, blood-curdling words would penetrate. With shrinking, he was compelled to listen to every detail of the fearful story.

"I don't want to hear any more, Harpie. Leave off, please ; I *hate* it !" he cried, imploringly.

"What folly ! A boy of fifteen afraid of a newspaper report ! It is only right and proper that you should read the news of the day." And the paragraph was continued.

Philip listened, or rather resigned himself to an involuntary audition, with a look that must have touched any other heart but Mrs. Harpfield's. Not the harrowing particulars of the crime affected him so much as that final paragraph concerning the revolutionary propaganda of medical women. Every word seemed to brand Nadine with infamy.

"Now I hope I have convinced you that Nadine is no fit person to harbour in the house. She has done you good, and will, of course, be handsomely rewarded; but I cannot any longer befriend her without seeming to approve of Nihilists and dynamiters. Who knows but that the secret police are not already on her track?"

"Harpie, do you really, really believe that Nadine would have anything to do with these wicked people?"

"She may not think that they are wicked; that is the worst of it. She may have come to believe that it is perfectly right to get rid of Emperors and rulers. You see, we know in reality next to nothing about her. The fact of being clever and kind stands for nothing."

The boy made no attempt to combat these vicious arguments, or proffer a plea on Nadine's behalf. Had she entered the room then, and Mrs. Harpfield offered to do her bodily injury, he would have flung himself on his nurse like an infuriated thing; but no

counter-influence was at hand. Drop by drop the poison worked.

"When will Nadine have to go, Harpie?"

"In a few days. She must, of course, have time to make her arrangements. I don't intend to behave unhandsomely to her. But now run and help Fanny to gather watercresses for tea. You were happy enough before Nadine came; you will have forgotten her existence before she has been away a week."

From Nadine to Fanny Farthing! From a star to its imitation in tinsel, a beautiful flower to its waxen copy! Fanny's persiflage and frolicsome ways failed to distract her young master to-day. She wreathed her dark hair with forget-me-nots, she pelted him with marsh marigolds, she took off shoes and stockings and challenged him to follow her across the brook, splashing him with her dainty feet, all in vain.

"I shall go home, you are cross. I won't hurry or scurry over my work another day in order to gather watercresses with you."

"Fanny, Fanny!" Philip cried.

But Fanny, elf-like, danced homewards with her basket, only looking back to smile and shake her head.

The soul-stricken boy was left in the dazzling spring world alone.

The young cling to happiness as their due, and feel it an injustice to be made to suffer. Philip heard the carol of the skylark—ecstasy

incarnate; the wagtails flashed gaily above the brook; the coppice woods were a-twitter with myriads of little birds; full of joyousness also seemed the upturned faces of the buttercups and daisies—Nature's mint, the gold and silver poured so lavishly on the land! He only was sad, and sadness made him vindictive.

Why had Harpie filled his mind with these horrors? Why had she set him against Nadine? He did not argue that from his nurse's point of view her behaviour was perfectly justifiable. Feeling as she did, she could not keep Nadine. Nor did he reason that the fact of having had the newspaper read to him made no difference whatever in the event itself. The Czar of Russia would have been blown to pieces by dynamite, medical women enrolled as Nihilists, whether a lad called Philip Summerhill existed or no. In his blind, illogical passion, evil only seemed evil as it affected his own life, and Harpie in making him realise wretchedness was really the author of it.

He sat on the bank, his face supported in his hands, vowing to himself that nothing she could do should ever make him happy again. He could not care about anything; he would not try to keep well, he would die.

Mrs. Harpfield had never attempted to instil anything like a religious notion into her pupil's mind. She was not one of those

shamefaced non-believers or lukewarm theologians who set themselves right with the world and their consciences by regular attendance at church. It never occurred to her that others could feel the spiritual needs to which she herself was entirely insensible. Nadine, for her part, had naturally taken neutral ground, endeavouring to brace the boy's character by lofty principles and high moral teaching, altogether avoiding creeds or conflicting points of doctrine.

Philip then faced his despair with a blank before him. He declared he would die, but death presented itself to him in all its stern realism. He had never heard of the apocalyptic city of pure gold with jasper walls in which there shall be no night. His childish vision had never been rapt with contemplating the country of Beulah, whose air is very sweet and pleasant, whence all travellers come from beyond the Valley of Death and from which they could not so much as see Doubting Castle. No poet's forecast had made death seem beautiful in his eyes. He should die and there would be an end of him, that was all.

Was the self-imposed task easy?

The brooklet rippling at his feet was a mere plaything; the remedy for all his woes was not there, the river was far away. Then he thought of the railway. Could he reach the embankment a mile and a half off and

throw himself under an express train? But he should never be able to lie still and let the steam-engine come thundering and crashing over him. No, he felt sure he should get up and run away. Tommy's rat poison occurred to him as the happiest solution of the difficulty. It was surely easy enough to swallow a tea-spoonful of yellow powder mixed with a little milk; and the rats died at once, were consumed as with fire in a moment. Yes, that was the plan. He would secrete the poison and take a dose on going to bed. Then nobody would suspect anything till the morning.

Lastly he thought of his will, but what had he to leave, and who was there to leave anything to?—only his pet rabbit, and was ever a will made in favour of rabbits?

Tears streamed down his cheeks as he thought of his favourites watching for him in vain. They were all very intelligent, and each had a little character of its own. Of the five, Flit was his favourite, Flit was the most loving; but Spry and Pod, Tim and Lo-lo all loved him, and frisked with delight at the sound of his voice. Would Tommy remember to give them fresh lettuce-leaves and their run on the grass every day? He doubted it; no one cared about animals in the place but himself. Mr. Don, Fauny, and Tommy liked dancing and supper-parties much better. He would leave all he possessed to his rabbits; they could not spend his money

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or wear his gold watch, but the money and watch could be given to some one for taking care of them. So he took out pencil and paper, and began to word his will thus:

"The last will and testament of Philip Summerhill. I leave my gold watch, my gold sleeve-buttons, all the money in my money-box, and my books and playthings to Flit, Spry, Pod, Tim, and Lo-lo. They are to have fresh lettuce-leaves and a run on the grass every day, and to be talked to and played with as they have always been with me. They are never to guess that I am gone away or that I am dead."

Philip had begun to indite his will with a smile, even with suppressed laughter, although his cheeks were still wet with tears. It seemed to him so irresistibly comic to make a will in favour of tame rabbits. But as he continued to write, there rose before his mind's eye the vision of five wistful, upturned faces. They were never to know that he was dead, but would miss him, grieve for him all the same, and Fanny would not care, nobody would care!

He put away pencil and paper, and tears flowed afresh, no longer for himself, and for his personal loneliness, but for his pets. No, he would not take the rat poison. If he were to die, most likely Flit and his companions would be left to perish of hunger. For their sakes he must live, and he sauntered

home with the dragging gait of the wretched, and took refuge in Tommy's society for the rest of the day. Nadine, sorely overcome with the tragic Russian news, at first hardly noticed the lad's embarrassment and depression. It was not till evening came, and a second or third time he left her under a futile pretext, that the conviction forced itself that something was wrong. Concerning his health she felt no apprehension, but the poison of Mrs. Harpfield's distilling was again at work. He was once more being induced to fear and distrust his only friend.

If Nadine felt troubled and unhappy, a very leaden weight of care lay upon Philip's soul. He went to bed early; but not to sleep. The fearful vision of the morning came back. Instead of close-lidded oblivion sealing his eyes, there flitted before him the frightful images called forth by his nurse's prelection. He might bury his head under the bed-clothes and try to conjure up the frisking ways of Flit and Lo-lo, all in vain! Making the darkness hideous with forms of terror and bloodshed, disturbing the silence with horrid sounds, the nightmare returned to stay.

As he lay thus tossing on an uneasy pillow, the door of his room unclosed softly, and he heard a voice call his name. At first it was a voice only; tones of tenderest entreaty and insinuation.

"Philip," Nadine said, "you should be asleep. I will sit by you a little while."

The boy made no attempt to reply; no guardian angels seemed near. In blind self-immolation he yielded to the influence of his evil genius.

A night-light burned in his room, and soon he realised that the voice had become a shape, wraith-like, making him shudder. It was not Nadine advancing towards his bedside, Nadine of beautiful presence and warm human affections, she was lost to him utterly, spirited away for ever; his distorted fancy saw now an awful impersonation of vindictiveness and stern, bloodthirsty hate. The white-robed figure wore garments stained with crimson patches, stains of blood, vengeance and doom incarnate; what else but mischief brought her here?

"Harpie, Harpie!" he cried, half beside himself with terror.

Mrs. Harpfield quitted her elegant little supper with Winn in a perfect thrill of triumph. Her object was attained; she saw Philip's idol lying on the floor, shattered into a thousand pieces by his own hand.

"Foolish darling!" she cried, fondling him and putting sweetmeats in his mouth. "Why, it is only Nadine in her white dressing-gown, trimmed with red ribbons, coming to give you a powder!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A CLIMAX.

MRS. HARPFIELD loved to pose as a Lady Bountiful, still more so as a focus of sweetness and light. She not only visited the sick and the poor, dispensing alms, she was at infinite pains to bestow intellectual benefits upon her less-favoured neighbours. To that intent she opened what was called a night-school, but what was in reality a centre of social and political propaganda. There might still be found in this Suffolk village, gray-haired men who could neither read nor write; the younger were often unable to do more. To Mrs. Harpfield it seemed a positive duty to call her workpeople together in order to supply these deficiencies, and open their eyes to the political part they would be called upon to play in the future. After lessons in reading, writing, and arithmetic, came a little lecture on some leading topic of the day, Mr. Greenbank sometimes taking her place as teacher and exponent of contemporary history.

Under other circumstances, such an event as the assassination, however diabolic, of an autocrat, would have been perhaps passed by. Mrs. Harpfield, naturally enough, was an enemy of all aristocracies; sharply defined

divisions of society were odious to her; she abhorred anything like caste or privilege. But the opportunity was not to be lost of justifying her conduct towards Nadine. Not only Mr. Don, Fanny and Tommy were to know why the young Russian, who had cured Philip, was to be so peremptorily sent away, the world, that is to say the village, would learn that although no church-goer or worshipper of royalty, Mrs. Harpfield had countenanced—if indeed she had countenanced a Nihilist—in the dark.

In the schoolroom it was strong meat given to babies; these fair-haired, rosy-cheeked, honest ploughmen as yet possessed no more historic or political knowledge than could be put in a nutshell. Were not the Russians our enemies, and, as such, the scum of the earth? The Crimean war they remembered well enough, and Emperor and people were a bad set, hardly a pin to choose between them. But though it is not other people's business, those who blow their lawful king to pieces ought to be hanged three times over.

"I've no believe in furreners, never had, with their queer talk," said Tommy's father, a hale veteran whose belief in the golden age to come was faint as yet. He had worked the best part of his life for eight or ten shillings a week, living on pork and dumplings, and did not exactly see that it was anybody's fault.

"Ah, Master Fouger," replied a neighbour,

"depend on 't 'tis Sodom and Gomorrah 't other side of the water. Folks don't go down on their knees to the Pope, nor eat hopping toads for nothing."

"Well, I'm glad least ways we're not going to harbour any Liarlists."

"Nihilists, Master Peck," put in Tommy.

"Humph, Liarlists is near enough, they are all liars, I'll be bound. I'm glad Mrs. Harpfield is going to send that young woman away. Woman doctors, indeed! I wouldn't call her in to doctor my cart-wheel."

"'Tis but a step from one thing to another," put in a third village sage. "Women doctors to-day, women preachers to-morrow, and Parliament women when we are dead and buried."

Next day the public attention happened to be directed into a wholly different channel. The great event of the year in these parts was the annual agricultural show—a gala appealing to all, and which every one could understand. To outsiders and casual observers, the charm and spell wrought by highly-finished pieces of domestic machinery, ploughs, harrows, turnip-cutters, and the like, may seem altogether incomprehensible; to those who have spent their lives in cultivating the land, and have been initiated step by step into the tremendous progress made in this direction, the contemplation of a new implement is fascinating in the

highest degree. The son of the soil placed before a masterpiece of Titian, the Venus of Milo, would admire coldly, unable to say what. Put him opposite a machine of the kind he has handled all his life, but now so perfected as to make it appear almost an automaton in his eyes, every faculty will become alert, every fibre alive with wonder and admiration. His rapture is just as warm, perhaps just as elevating as that of a connoisseur in art before a renowned master-piece of sculpture or painting. And he can be quite as eloquent. Here every touch tells; every minute part is understood; he dwells with intense delight upon an improvement none are better able to realise than himself; and his pride—for it seems a matter of personal trouble to him—reaches its acme over some especially happy invention, an automatic seed-sower, for instance, by which bushels of seed are economised in the year, the tiny cup containing it being so adjusted that not a grain can be spilt in the sowing.

For the rest such a scene is lively and inspiring enough. The glow of bright blue and red machinery, and the flashing steel and polished iron, are thrown out in striking relief by the background of green turf. Far as the eye can reach, the level landscape of meadow and field encloses as a frame an infinite variety of highly-finished newly-decorated machinery, fresh from the

workshop and the foundry, with gay crowds filling every space between the red and the blue. Bands of music play at intervals, and on the outskirts of the show a raree-show adds to the animation of the hour. Punch and Judy, gingerbread stalls, panoramas, and other penny merriments tempt the lovers of pleasure.

For the most part these rustics kept to the machinery, no longer a blouse or shepherd's frock to be seen among them, each dressed in broad-cloth as if bound to a funeral. But for their slouching gait—the gait of those who have followed the plough all their lives—and their naïve look of wonder, they might pass muster for country gentlemen, so scrupulously neat and so entirely cosmopolitan in their appearance. The Suffolk labourer does not disdain the fare of his fathers, he is still resigned to a miserable pittance, but will have his black coat for Sundays and holidays. Listen to their talk—that is to say, if the dialect is not Greek to the stranger—this rapture over highly-perfected machinery never in the least degree to benefit themselves, is unmixed with envy. They have toiled on the land from morning till night, in the heat and the cold, bringing about unrivalled harvest and a culture perhaps unequalled in Europe, yet without a particle of benefit to themselves, with no more interest in such results than if they were deni-

zens of the moon. That they should sow and others reap, that the fruits of the earth, even the soil itself, to which all earth's children have equal right, should be the monopoly of the few, these things have not as yet embittered them as cruel, deep injustice. Truly the Anglo-Saxon character is endowed with the quality of endurance to a pathetic degree!

Of course every one in the neighbourhood and for miles flocked to the show, and the event for the time being put all others in the background. Philip was despatched on foot under Tommy's care; Mrs. Harpfield, in an elegant summer costume ordered from London, drove thither in her pretty pony-chaise; the rest of the household had their hours of liberty. Nadine found herself in the big house alone but for Betty the dairy-woman, and forgotten. She had been similarly abandoned for the last two days, that is to say since the catastrophe in the newspaper, or rather she had been tabooed. Mrs. Harpfield stood somewhat in awe of Nadine. She wanted to drive her into seeking an understanding, and hoped she had here hit upon the right expedient. Philip was kept away from her under one pretext and another, Fanny was ordered to look grave and answer any question put by Nadine in monosyllables. Even Betty was told that the young foreign lady was a Russian, and that the Russians were the most perverted people on the face of the globe!

Nadine read between the lines, and there seemed nothing to do but to leave Philip to his fate. She would at once make preparations for departure, and inform Mrs. Harpfield of her intention ; but before leaving Reedmere Hall, she would seek another interview with Sir Vernon Vernon. Perhaps he might yet be induced to take up the boy's case.

It was a perfect afternoon, and she set out for her four miles' walk with alacrity. She always seemed to breathe a purer air outside the precincts of Mrs. Harpfield's abode. The prospect of quitting for ever a presence absolutely hateful to her, raised her spirits and made her forget the awful news of two days ago. She would go to Paris, where she had friends, and there pursue her medical studies for yet another year or two.

As she emerged into the high road, she was reminded of something unusual taking place. Vehicles of all kinds, from the fashionable landau to the farmer's sulky, horseman and pedestrian, passed her at frequent intervals bound to the show, which was installed between Sir Vernon's park and the town. To reach her destination, Nadine would have to pass through the thick of the crowd.

"How d'ye do?" cried a pleasant, although uncheery voice, as Winn pulled up in his handsome dog-cart, a servant in livery behind him. "Do let me persuade you to

go back. You will find the show unpleasantly crowded just now. I will set you down at Reedmere Hall."

"Thank you, I am bound for Sir Vernon's. Is there any other way?"

"You are too far now to take the field-path. I will drive you." Then an unwelcome possibility seemed to strike him. He was afraid of meeting Mrs. Harpfield. "But no, I fear I cannot do that. Won't to-morrow do for your visit?"

"What harm can the crowd do me?"

"None that I know of, only the heat and dust are unpleasant, and a good many of these honest ploughmen will take a glass of ale more than is good for them before evening comes on. You had really much better let me drive you straight home."

"Indeed, I would rather fulfil my errand, many thanks," she replied; then she bowed and walked on. The turmoil of the gala seemed a far more agreeable alternative than an interview with Winn just then. His troubled looks let her partly into his secret. His entanglements were more hopeless than ever.

As she approached the outskirts of the show, the novelty around pleased and exhilarated her. The whole scene afforded a new insight into English rural life. These phlegmatic, flaxen-haired, blue-eyed country folks could evidently relish a holiday

as well as the warmer-blooded Southerner. Having inspected the machinery, bestowing on it all the concentration of which they were capable, they were now indulging in a conclave or drinking bout. For the most part the merry-making was innocent enough, and an East Anglian Teniers might have made many a humorous group. The village wit making mirth for the rest, with his neighbour, the politician, laying down the law, the modest listening to his wiser neighbours; all these were studies instinct with life and genuineness.

Nadine had now to cross one of the most crowded thoroughfares of the show—a broad carriage road, with drinking booths and gingerbread stalls on either side. As she made slow way she thought she caught voices that she knew.

True enough, it was Tommy in front of a tent, haranguing a group of open-mouthed listeners at the pitch of his voice; three or four of the audience were provided with high stools on which they sat perched, a glass of ale poised with one hand on the knee. The rest stood around, and it was evident from their flushed cheeks, loud vociferation, and immoderate gesture, that all—Tommy included—had plied the home-brewed pretty freely.

Nadine edging past, now heard the young orator declaim as follows :

"Now," cried Tommy, "you see the difference, don't you? If you don't, your skulls must be as thick as a flet cheese. Here, in this land of liberty, we set about getting our rights as free-born Britons should; we don't want to shed anybody's blood, even of those who have kept us from a share of the land, and that. But these Russian Nihilists, that's the word." Suiting the action to the word, he stooped down and with his stick traced the letters on the dusty ground. "Well, these Nihilists, instead of speaking out boldly, setting forth their grievances, each man claiming his own and that—these Nihilists go to work like vermin-killers, setting traps in the dark; and the Emperor—I won't say that he was a good one or a bad one, for I don't know and don't much care—this Emperor, I say, was blown to pieces when he was quietly enjoying himself as we are doing now. These Nihilists—but here's one; least-ways, here's some one who knows all about them; let us hear what she has to say."

It was easy to see that Tommy had been drinking, and his companions, one and all, were in the same case. Nadine, realising the true state of affairs, endeavoured to hurry past; but at a sign from their leader, three of the roysterers joined hands and barred her passage. The gaping bystanders closed round; she was hopelessly encompassed.

"Come, miss," Tommy began, as unlike

himself as drinking can make a man, "come, doctor, let's hear what you've got to say."

"Doctor? *She* a doctor! Why, she's as pretty a lass to kiss as another. Will you give me a kiss, miss? and then I won't ask any more questions about what's going on at home; in your own country, I mean," said one.

A roar of laughter greeted this speech. Closer and closer round Nadine, pressed the revellers and crowd. She glanced before her and behind her to see only wave upon wave of upturned, irreverent faces; perhaps neither malice nor brutality written on any one, but curiosity of the grosser kind, and boorish, unbridled bravado.

But she was a foreigner, her native country was of evil report in men's mouths just now; only a word, a look, a sign was needed to turn the position into one of absolute peril.

"Mind what you are about, Jem," cried a speaker. "When I kiss, I make sure beforehand that it is a girl, not a lubber like myself; now, if miss here is a doctor, how can she be a woman? That is the question I put to all here present."

Again coarseness was accepted for wit, and a round of guffaws encouraged the speaker.

"She don't wear a beard, leastways, but what about her hair—is it a wig?" pursued the wit. "Come, miss, show us if the hair on your head is your own."

"Off with your hat; off with her hat!"

shouted several voices from the crowd; the spark had fallen on the tinder. Nadine was rudely pushed by those nearest. Pale, almost fainting from the heat, she saw herself at the mercy of half-drunken carters and ploughmen, when a diversion occurred.

The crowd had been too much occupied to notice an open carriage and pair that now literally ploughed its way through their midst, the driver laying his whip ruthlessly to the right and left, forcing a passage, whilst standing bolt upright, in light overcoat and tall white hat with crape band, dealing tremendous blows with his silver-knobbed umbrella, was the awful figure of Sir Vernon Vernon. The face of the gallant old knight was scarlet with indignation, and more than one oath escaped his lips, austere Churchman though he was, as breathless and adust, he reached the thick of the fray.

"Fools, brutes, madmen!" he cried, transfixing the aggressors with the terrible frown of the county magistrate. "Hands off that lady, or, by Heavens, I'll crack the skull of every mother's son among you."

Still belabouring the passive culprits as vigorously as Don Quixote castigated the wind-mills, he descended, and having one foot on the step of the carriage, invited Nadine to enter.

"Take a seat, Miss—Miss"—he could not for the life of him remember her name—"Get in, please."

Meantime the sight of Sir Vernon's white hat, the tallest in the county, and the sound of his well-known voice, acted like the sight of mounted dragoons on the crowd. Idle lookers-on slunk away, bystanders who had not moved a finger in the affair dodged the silver-knobbed umbrella as best they could, whilst the offenders caught in the act, stood paralysed with fear and contrition.

"I shall have the felicity of meeting you gentlemen before the bench this day week," said Sir Vernon, eyeing the group sternly. "William, drive on."

CHAPTER XIV.

"YET——"

It was now midsummer, and what a midsummer in Sir Vernon's park! The beautiful season of buds was over; the rich crimson and yellow sheath of the chestnut had spread into a fan of waxen green; the purple elm tips were displaced by smooth, shining leaves of emerald; the dull brown hedges had become leafy courts for myriads of singing-birds; and every tree, the majestic as well as the humble, showed the same butterfly-like transformation. If, indeed, any season can be more exquisite than that of blossoms, it is the ever-

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recurring spring-tide of the earth, the budding-time.

No matter where you go out of doors the scene is one of enchantment; but in the park itself, all painful contrast between natural beauty and over-burdened human life is absent. Beyond its precincts may be seen patient men and women toiling painfully in the sweet-scented hay-field, as their forefathers toiled before them, and with hardly bettered prospects, hardly more of a future. This soil they cultivate so laboriously, these fruits of the earth they gather in so zealously, are not for them; they are bidden from the pulpit on Sundays, to wait for the "good time coming," not in the familiar world they know, but another to be reached only through the gloomy portal of the grave.

Nature is gay, Nature rejoices whether her children suffer or no. Every bank is pink with the sweet-scented willow herb, and ragged robin. High above droop wild rose and honeysuckle, whilst the little silvery star-like blossoms of the stitchwort seem to follow us everywhere, fairy eyes dodging our footsteps with benignant intent. Inside the park, one might have supposed that no thought of human enjoyment had ever entered into the minds of its projectors, but that it had been created expressly for the deer, the birds, and the bees. It was like entering a concert-hall, a perfect volley of exultant

music bursting forth from open glade, cop-pice, and alley; and the wise birds, feeling that the domain was their own, paid no attention whatever to intruders. They sang for themselves, as true singers should, not for the express purpose of being listened to.

The beauty of the place, its virginal freshness, its peacefulness might well have made life seem a benediction to sadder souls than Nadine. How could she help being sad—sad for her country, sad for Philip?—but she was strong and self-reliant. Life presented itself to her under many aspects. If the clouds were heavy and sombre over some mountain tops, the others yet caught the golden sun-rays; only those who live in the dead level of personality find all joy and beauty blotted out by a single care.

For the moment entire peace was hers; Sir Vernon had driven her home after the catastrophe at the fair, and she was only too thankful to accept shelter for a day or two. But when the day or two had passed, her host was unwilling to let her go.

"Stay with me a little while," he said; "a septuagenarian may well offer hospitality to a young lady of your age. My eyesight is failing sadly; I was on the look-out for some one to put my papers in order. As to doctor's fees, well, I won't promise to call you in if I fall ill; I have more faith in my old friend

Grinder. Why it is I don't know; but so it is. However, a guinea is a guinea, whether paid for getting knowledge out of other people's noddles, or putting poison into one's own body."

She stayed, gratefully accepting 'harbour and good company,' as did Bunyan's pilgrim at the house of Gaius. She had not relinquished all hope of rescuing Philip, and Sir Vernon, if any one, could help her. For the moment these projects were kept in abeyance; the immediate task was to gain her host's confidence.

The very next day after her arrival, Sir Vernon initiated her into her new duties.

"The fact is," he began, "I want not only to look over all my papers, and those of my poor wife also, destroying everything of no value and of a compromising nature, but to catalogue my books, pictures, and works of art; in fine, to prepare everything for the long journey I am about to undertake."

"You are going to travel?" asked Nadine, innocently.

The old man smiled.

"I am past seventy, Miss Nadine. The journey before me is a very long one, and return tickets are unfortunately not available for it. At my age a man should be in readiness for the final knock at his door, the impatient rat-tat-tat of Death!"

Nadine could not forbear a frank smile. The hale veteran, upright as a pine-tree, with the rose of health upon his cheek, looked as if he had still many a year before him.

"Ah! laugh away. But a man who has enjoyed his three-score ten and odd, may well make room for others at the fair. And what have I to live for, I should like to know? My poor wife, the faithful companion of well-nigh fifty years, is gone; I have no children, no kith nor kin who would shed more than three tears at most—and those squeezed out with difficulty—when they come into my property; old friends have dropped and are dropping off. A man of my age is like the last passenger in a train that has been travelling all day. One by one, his fellow passengers have reached their destinations; when the train stops for the last time, he is alone."

This speech, so solemn in its import, yet spoken sportively, permitted a playful reply.

"It seems to me that as long as we *can* live, and I think we ought to live as long as we can, something may always be found to live for," she said, "if only the rescue of a homeless cat."

"I certainly shan't run out into the highways and byways and cry out, 'Ho there! This way, this way, friend Death.

You have surely forgotten where I live ; turn about, if you please.' And you are right, young lady ; we honest folks ought to try to live to be a hundred, in order to combat the villains. Well, now, let me tell you where we will begin—at the letters. If there is one duty imposed by conscience on every Christian man and woman, it is that of destroying letters. Is it not so ? The kind friends who have loved us, the innocent souls who have confided in us, the unfortunate ones who have solicited our help. Is it not a piece of heartlessness, even brutality, to leave these confidences to the sacrilegious spying of outsiders ? No, into the fire with them all—affection, folly, misfortune—let their records be held sacred, buried with us in the tomb."

He took from his pocket a bunch of keys, and singling one out, slipped it from the ring.

"We will begin, if you please, with my wife's correspondence. She, dear woman, like three-fourths of your sex, spent the half of her life in letter-writing—ponds of ink and cart-loads of paper lavished with hearty good-will upon her friends ; and if letters could be made to vanish into nothing by magic, like the balls of an Indian juggler, I should have nothing to say against the amiable propensity ; but paper, unfortunately, has nine lives like a cat, fire won't consume it, water won't drown it, the earth won't assimilate it. When we have got through the letters, the question will

be, what to do with the cart-load of paper. If any adventurous person were to set up a letter-consuming machine, and travel with it over the country like a scissor-grinder, depend upon it, he would do a rattling trade."

So the *escritoire* of the late mistress of the house was unlocked, and the onerous task begun. The reading of letters may be compared to the bringing up of a numerous family. Over the rearing of the first, too much proud and loving care cannot be bestowed. When the tenth or eleventh come into the world, christening fêtes lose their éclat, friends and neighbours are no longer called in to see baby washed, and his first walking feat is not noised abroad as miraculous. The first bundle of letters, we untie with trembling fingers, is minutely inspected, commented upon, smiled upon, tear-bedewed. As the process continues, each missive obtains briefer perusal; by-and-by, the contents are merely glanced at, finally address and superscription are read only, the letter is cast into the waste-paper basket, and straightway we go to another. For the first week Sir Vernon and Nadine proceeded at a snail's pace. Not a five-lined note, not a scrap of paper was neglected, whilst the long epistles, oftentimes crossed, of intimate friends and kinsfolk, were read with the greatest care from beginning to end. This reawakening of memories, long laid to sleep, could but bring mingled joy

and pain. The old man seemed to revisit scenes, and re-enact events, which many and many a year ago had faded into dreamland. Once familiar faces were before him, voices long hushed filled the silence, that dreamland of memory became vivid and life-like, his present existence for the moment a dream.

"Stây," he said, as Nadine was about to tear up a note accepting an invitation to dinner. "What can be called a trifle in life? That note, even if I were not edging towards the grave, or if one could carry a pocketful of relics with us thither, should never be destroyed. Well, you never heard of the writer, and he went to his rest years ago, poor fellow, so I may in half-a-dozen words tell you the story. He was my wife's favourite brother, and, as is always the case with women's predilections, of course, the scapegrace of the family. In fact, poor Tom was just going to the devil as fast as he could, when he was pulled up by—what think you? A pair of black eyes! He tumbled over head and ears in love with a nice girl, a ward of my own. My wife and I fell out about it, the only time we ever quarrelled in our lives. She vowed that Tom should have Mary; I vowed he shouldn't. It was thundering, lightening, raining pitch-forks with us for days and days, and all about poor Tom. At last I veered round, and gave him a chance. He was to make a solemn promise that if he

accepted a certain invitation to dinner, meeting the said young lady, he would abjure bad company and reprobate habits from that day—which he did, with considerable looking after. You would never guess from the wording of it, would you, that such a scribble contained the most solemn promise a man can make? 'Tis forty years ago, and yet how well I remember the whole affair! Tom as shy as a boarding-school miss, my poor wife beaming with triumph, the bride elect all smiles and blushes, and the dinner first-rate, tip-top, A 1. My wife had an especial talent for giving good dinners and dressing well, perhaps the most valuable a woman can possess. What comes next? A foreigner, by the look of it. We travelled a good deal, and made acquaintances in every capital of Europe, with whom Lady Vernon kept up a correspondence till her dying day."

Letters from idlers in France and Italy, still perfumed with the flowers pressed between the pages many a year ago; letters from nowhere, that is to say, written by yacht voyagers, having for address latitude and longitude only; letters dropped from the clouds, in other words, borne from besieged Paris by balloon; pencillings under a tent, within sight of Persepolis, a water-colour vignette accompanying the words; scribblings of an Arctic explorer, whilst wintering amid icebergs and darkness; a word or two, perhaps

the final farewell, of an ardent soldier on the eve of battle; all these were here, and doubtless their prototypes may be found in many another loving woman's cabinet. Men shake hands cordially with son, brother, or nephew, bound on adventurous duty or quest; it is the mother, sister, aunt, who write to the wanderer. As the Roman vestals piously kept up the sacred fire, so do women keep perpetually alive warm human affection. But, indeed, for this beautiful feminine weakness, the infatuation of the pen, many an expatriated Englishman would be as completely isolated from domestic influences as Robinson Crusoe.

When a week had passed, and the task seemed only begun, Sir Vernon recommended a new method of procedure.

"This will never do," he said, "a whole week, and only one set of drawers ransacked; at such a pace we shall have Father Time tapping me on the shoulder and bidding me begone ere trunks are packed. No, Miss Nadine, dearly as we love our friends, highly as we prize their letters, let us not read them twice; the gist of a letter lies in the first reading. 'Tis like a flower that has its own season, a riddle that has been read, a glass of champagne to be tasted when bubbling. For the future you will, if you please, read me the address and signature of each letter only, just glancing yourself at the purport. At this rate, we may hope to work our way through

my poor wife's collection by harvest, and to get to the end of mine by Martinmas, and then there will still be a good deal to do, if you are minded to put up with an old man's whims a little longer. Plenty of time before you for killing and curing; but mine for humdrum happiness is short."

So they worked their way through a second cabinet, the occupation proceeding with hardly more briskness. The letters were not read from beginning to end, but the opening and final lines invited almost interminable reminiscence and comment. And tenderly and delicately as the business was done, almost solemnly as were these confidences breathed upon, yet such a taste savours ever of sacrilegiousness. The signature of a letter—that dedication of love and friendship, in which is summed up the relation of writer to reader—is often its most pregnant part. The contents may speak of matters wholly worldly or commonplace; the writing itself may be discursive, vain, pompous; the affectionate valediction reminds us of two human beings, mortal and prone to weakness like ourselves, but capable of friendship, who loved and trusted each other.

"You can understand now," said Sir Vernon, wiping his eyes with a crimson silk pocket-handkerchief, "why I could not employ an ordinary amanuensis for this business;

least of all, any one in the neighbourhood, to whom so many names here would be familiar. You are as completely a stranger to me and my affairs as if you had dropped from the moon; I am therefore abusing no confidences in entrusting the task to yourself. When you go back to your own country, you will soon forget that an old fogey named Sir Vernon existed!"

"I am of course subject to diseases that affect the memory, as well as my fellow-creatures," Nadine replied, drily.

"Well, you shall have one good reason for remembering me, anyhow. You shall not go away empty-handed. But reading these letters makes me feel melancholy; they remind me of far happier days than I am sure I ever deserved. My wife and I lived together for well-nigh fifty years, prosperous, respected, surrounded by friends; and now I am a lonely, ailing, dim-sighted old man, the undertaker waiting for me, and the impatient next-of-kin anxious for the money."

Nadine's frank laugh chased away these gloomy visions.

"The undertaker and next-of-kin may have to wait many a year, judging from appearances," she said. "But far better leave the letters to me. If I come upon anything important I can put it aside for you, and meantime, when you like, I will read aloud. You said the other day you

would like a little more reading, if time permitted."

"Ah! time does not permit, that is just it. The letters are a mere bagatelle. I have all kinds of belongings to get through that will take much more time. I am like a shopkeeper with stock-taking in hand. My poor wife's knickknacks, for instance, waggon-loads of objects that are neither fish, flesh, nor good red herrin', as the Scotch say; certainly not valuable, and yet not altogether rubbish; they must all be looked carefully over. Then pictures, engravings, curiosities of every imaginable description; I feel bound to know what there is, before shooting such a dust-bin at another man's door. It is unfair to deluge one's heir direct—much as you dislike him—with kickshaws he can't get rid of, and has no room for. So to our task!"

They first took in hand the portfolios.

"Why can't tourists trust to their memories?" said Sir Vernon, as he ruefully eyed the vast array. "What does a man want with a photograph of the Colosseum, for instance, who has seen it with his own eyes? I have nothing to say against the photograph when applied to its proper uses, and in its right place. A notorious thief should be photographed, so should a church steeple, if the highest ever built; but not Lake Como or Vaucluse. Even the skilled artist vulgarises them!"

He glanced from the portfolios to the cabinet of china and foreign bric-à-brac adorning the room, and shook his head with an expression of comic despair.

"Happy, thrice happy, the poor clerk who saves up a little money for a return ticket to Rome or Chamouni, without a shilling to spare on gewgaws by the way. The way to travel, Miss Nadine, is to return as empty-handed as you started, but with a headful of ideas. Yes, there is a kind of wealth that is a mild curse to its owner. I mean the spare guineas in his purse when he travels in foreign parts. He must do something with them, and so he buys everything useless and incommodious under the sun—busts, an incubus next door to a live elephant in a dwelling-house; yards of outlandish stuff only fit for clothing Pharaoh's wife; pots and pans which won't hold water, and are only fit for an Indian wigwam; beads, baskets, slippers, Heaven knows what. One might suppose from the avidity with which the born Briton fills packing-cases on his travels, that nothing either for use or ornament were to be purchased at home. I'm an old man, I have had my day, and don't want time to run back again. But I wish I felt young enough to make one foreign trip more, say to Constantinople, for the pleasure of not buying anything on the way. 'Tis a

"ANGEL'S WINGS."

foolish wish, I've done with travelling and buying. Yet——"

That little word so innocent in itself, but capable of such deep meaning, stopped the day's business somewhat awkwardly. The old man added, with a tear in his eye and a blush on his cheek :

"Yet—— Another time, my dear, I'll finish another time."

CHAPTER XV.

"ANGEL'S WINGS."

WHEN that mischief-making little word "yet" fell from her host's lips, Nadine had spent several weeks under his roof. There is a certain freemasonry in noble, ingenuous natures. The old English country gentleman, revered and esteemed as a second Sir Roger de Coverley by his neighbours, had recognised at once in the young foreigner an individuality to be trusted. He regarded her calling as an anomaly of the first water, yet, unconsciously to himself, the very fact of that calling inspired confidence. A woman may be on a wholly wrong intellectual tack in the eyes of the orthodox, she may be regarded as her own worst enemy in thus entering the lists with the other sex, but it is quite clear

that she is no trifle. Whatever we may urge against new-fangled doctrines, life has presented itself to her under the aspect of a grave moral responsibility. Till the utterance of that suggestive configuration of three letters, the little word "yet" spoken with such significant, wistful hesitancy, the intercourse of patron and protégée had been easy and profitable to both. Nadine stayed on, hoping to help Philip before leaving England altogether, and trying to interest Sir Vernon in his story little by little.

Hitherto she had made no attempt to see the lad, and indeed had hardly once quitted the precincts of the Park, except in her host's carriage.

"I gave your molesters at the show the slightest possible sentence on your own account," he had said. "I don't think the poor fellows knew what they were about, and it is wonderful how an extra glass of beer and the sight of a crowd make their heads go round. You won't be hooted as a Nihilist any more, I fancy. But to oblige me, my dear young lady, do keep to the grounds for the present. It is kinder, more prudent."

So she remained as ignorant of what was taking place at Reedmere Hall as if seas instead of three or four miles of cornfields divided them. Mrs. Harpfield, at her request, had despatched her trunks with the briefest,

coldest word of farewell. There the intercourse between the two ended.

"I don't like what you tell me about the whole concern," was Sir Vernon's comment on her oft-repeated story. "It has a black look, a very black look. But how you or I or any outsider can interfere, I ransack my brains to find out. It seems to me just one of those cases in which His Satanic Majesty has the right of common. I am sorry to say his right extends over a good bit of ground. But we will see, we will see."

The so pathetically ejaculated "yet" set Nadine thinking all the more wistfully about Philip. A lengthy stay under Sir Vernon's roof was now out of the question. Chivalrous as he was, considerateness and reserve incarnate, he could no longer be to her what he had hitherto been. The host was translated into the suitor for her hand, the benefactor changed to the lover. The sooner she left this pleasant harbour of refuge the better, but she could not go without taking leave of Philip.

She knew that an interview could only be obtained by stealth or diplomacy. She must either watch the lad in the near neighbourhood of Reedmere Hall, or prevail upon Winn to bring about the meeting. A kind word, a sign of friendliness would make him her leal servitor. It was far from easy under present circumstances to go on foot to the

old Manor House, and she knew that Sir Vernon would oppose the undertaking. The carriage was ever at her disposal—but for any other errand. She decided to appeal to Winn.

A note, no matter how carefully worded, may always leave or seem to leave something to the recipient's imagination. We may be sure of the effect of what we say, we can never with equal certainty predict the effect of what we write.

Nadine's missive, consisting of half-a-dozen lines only, was written strictly on Philip's behalf, yet appealing as it did to Winn's sympathies, might well seem an overture of friendship from herself. The warm, unmistakable glow of feeling in every word, feeling which Philip alone had called forth, was equally and deliciously misleading. She despatched her letter, wholly unconscious that it was weighted with fate.

The note reached Winn at noon, and towards evening of the same day, she quitted the park gates in the vague hope of meeting him. Just outside Sir Vernon's grounds was a bit of coppice wood that seemed by an effort of its own to have escaped annexation to the great man's estate. These little spinnies of larch and fir, with thickets of hazel-nut round about, belonged, wonderful to relate, to no one, that is to say to the lawful owner, the public. Here in autumn, rustic lovers went a-nutting, and here the moth, the squirrel,

and the night-bird had a little kingdom to themselves. And the wild roses also. The brilliant sunshine of the midday had been followed by a thunderstorm, and what a magician is that in June! The earth then seems made for beauty, joy, and fragrance only; every dew-laden rose-leaf, every honeysuckle bell exhale sweetness, and, as it seems, gratitude. To-day, the heavy rain-drops glittering like diamonds in the sunshine, having cooled the air, now seemed to bring forth added warmth and softness. One by one the dark thunder-clouds had rolled away, unveiling a deeper and yet deeper heaven of intensest blue, and between the two, contrasted alike with the purple black and sunny azure—white sails unfurled upon a changeful sea!—floated cloudlets, fleecy, soft, and silvery white. The birds, silent and invisible hitherto, as if some invisible conductor had lifted his baton, all at once burst forth with singing; after the first lull of the storm the hushed woodlands rang with harmony. Far and wide, high and low, the music filled the place, as the orchestrated bands of some spacious cathedral; and ever and anon, as in a choir of human voices, here one note would surpass the rest, soaring higher and higher, at last poising in height of melody unreachable to its compeers.

In this dewy, sparkling, perfume-breathing world Nadine wandered, all the perplexities

and disenchantments of life lost to sight for awhile, existence momentarily meaning thankfulness and delight only. Hope ever comes when we beckon, and it seemed just then that all might yet be well. The whim, for thus she regarded it, of her kind protector, would take the form of a really earnest desire to serve her, Philip would be rescued by Sir Vernon's agency, and she could then set forth on her own career without the mortification of a first failure. Just then, as she revelled in these cheerful thoughts, and in the little Eden, as she fancied, all her own, a horrid detonation disturbed the peaceful place.

Such a sound—the sound of a pistol-shot fired by no aimless or unsteady hand—at once changed the aspect of the scene; terror and dismay now reigned instead of tranquillity and delight. The report silenced the birds, as completely as if one and all had been mortally hit by the invisible marksman; there was a universal rustling of wings, and Nadine, pale and breathless, hastening through the panic-stricken woods in the direction of the sound, seemed the only living thing left there.

But one! A few paces off, just behind the bit of copse she had quitted, and outside another close-set thicket of hazel and hawthorn, she came upon the ghastly, blood-stained figure of Winn. A moment later, and her interposition would have been too

late. That instant he was about to place the pistol a second time to his ear.

"Murderer, coward!" she cried, rushing forward in order to throw herself between the would-be suicide and his weapon; but the perilous struggle was averted. The sound of her voice acted like a charm. Winn's look of frenzied, almost maniacal determination passed away. Without a word he let her take the pistol from his hands.

"For it is murder, it is cowardice," she added, all the bitterness of the words softened by the passion and pathos of her voice and look. "Our lives do not belong to us. Did we create them for our own paltry ends? And can wretched animals, the beings man loves to torture, thus escape the burden of existence? Is self-murder warranted by divinely planted instinct in them? If they have to endure to the end, shall not we? You have not even the excuse of being one of my countrymen, a liberty-loving Russian. What made you afraid to live? But first, you should let me bathe your forehead; blood is still flowing."

"It is a mere scratch, thank you; let it be." He smiled grimly, and added: "I suppose, much as one wishes to die, the wish to live is stronger, or it is not so easy to put a bullet through one's brains as it seems."

She insisted, however, on wetting her handkerchief in the sodden grass, washing the

temple clean, then with his own, bound up the wound. He leaned against a tree-stem, pale, shaken; but his old cynical, reckless self.

"What made me afraid of living? I will show you."

Straightway he drew from his waistcoat pocket a tiny, satin-cushioned box, in which was a woman's wedding-ring.

"That and something else. To-morrow, thanks to you, Mary Ann Harpfield, Philip's Harpie, will be my wife. Would you have pulled away the pistol had you guessed it?"

"Is there no means of escape, no possibility of drawing back?"

"None whatever. The poor wretch condemned to the rope will mount the scaffold bravely once; but if the rope snaps he is a poltroon next time. I assure you, even to escape that woman, I have not nerve or resolution enough to pull the trigger a second time. Now, for the something else—I destroyed it—your letter, I mean. I did not wish your name to be mixed up in the hideous story."

"My letter?" Nadine faltered.

"Perhaps you intended no harm. I was most likely a fool, but the letter seemed to me unnecessarily kind." He looked at her, as if hoping, at the same time half-dreading, confirmation of his words; her frank reply quickly undeceived him.

"Oh," she said, with tears in her eyes, "I was thinking of Philip, and of your kindness to him, and wrote gratefully and appealingly on his account, that was all."

"Do not be so concerned. My mind was almost made up before I received your note. I wanted to liberate myself, at the same time to punish her——"

Nadine broke in quickly.

"You are not Philip Summerhill. You have no right to marry Mrs. Harpfield upon these terms. She becomes the victim. There *must* be some loophole of escape," she urged, growing more and more vehement, pleading now even for her enemy. "Be open; say that instead of love you have only hate to offer. Make her realise exactly how you feel about the marriage; she would—any woman must—let you go thankfully."

He shook his head.

"There was a time when I felt differently. I had not seen you. I did not know her. What was truth on my lips half a year ago is a lie to-day; how can I make her see this? And her mind is set upon marrying a so-called gentleman—that is how she puts it. Looking back, I now see that with my eyes wide open, I have deliberately walked into as clever a trap as was ever set for any human being."

"You ought not to marry her. Happiness, there can be no question of; but

self-respect, the habit of resisting evil, the very faculty of discerning right from wrong will be lost. Little by little, you will be so lowered in your own opinion, and that of others, that you will at last cease to hearken to conscience altogether. You stand on the verge of a precipice. Let me draw you back!"

"Entice me; yes, you might do that," he said, slowly and deliberately, fixing the strangest look upon her. "A little word from you, a smile even, and I would at the eleventh hour back out of this marriage."

"Let us speak to each other not as lovers, that can never be," she cried, passionately; "not as friends, since my friendship you do not value; but as two human beings brought together in a desperate strait. Marry Mrs. Harpfield, then; but with honest, manly intent. Do not say to yourself that you are going to humiliate and exasperate her till every particle of feminine softness is extinguished, and you have turned her into a fury, bent on revenge only. If indeed she cares for you, you may render this tie not only tolerable but endearing; wedlock may prove a blessing instead of a curse. Think of Philip; you may rescue that innocent boy from a dreadful fate; influenced by you, your wife——"

"Don't utter that name, for God's sake; any word but that," exclaimed Winn, with an aghast look.

"You are, after all, a free agent. Circumstances may seem to force you, but have not really forced you, into marrying Mrs. Harpfield. And your wife she will be," Nadine went on, "not to be treated roughly—oh! let me hope that—not despised and trampled under foot, on account of this womanly weakness, perhaps her only one, but to be appealed to and gently taken to task on higher ground; you may gradually make her blush for doing wrong. Your influence, if exercised for good, may even make a peaceful fireside possible."

"Nothing can be as you say," Winn replied, in a tone of dogged despair. "Whose will is the stronger? That will be the problem before us, I fancy; or there is left a middle, smooth, immoral course, each of us to go our own way stolidly, keeping at a respectful distance from each other, accepting with what resignation we can, the curse we have brought upon ourselves!"

Nadine turned to go with despair in her heart; even her feeling for Mrs. Harpfield was now changed from vindictiveness to compassion.

"Will you not say farewell?" asked Winn.

"We shall most likely meet again," she replied, coldly, and quitted the spinney without looking back.

CHAPTER XVI.

MEPHISTOPHELES AT BAY.

WINN remained where Nadine had left him till the glow of sunset faded from the wood, and, by little and little, twilight empurpled the scene. He had no wish to let any one else into the humiliating secret Nadine he knew would keep so generously. Having waited till the gloaming would veil his features from any acquaintance he might meet, he pocketed the revolver, then set off, as dark-browed, crestfallen, conscience-pricked a mortal as those sweet heavens looked down upon. Fiercely vindictive towards what he chose to call his ill-luck and evil geniuses, he yet felt the sting of remorse. He ought to have been stronger from the first, and who could tell? Had he avoided Mrs. Harpfield and her doubtful associates, had he by dint of uncompromising self-denial held to the path of uprightness and honour, Nadine might have smiled upon him.

It must indeed be a blindly conscienceless nature that sees no ground for self-recrimination in the midst of the direst dilemma, humanly speaking avoidable. For a brief introspective moment, Winn blamed no one for his wretchedness but himself. Why had he given way to the foolish temptation of appear-

ing what he was not? His riding-horses, his smart man-servant, and the numerous luxuries indulged in, not at all because they were necessary for his comfort, but because they impressed the world—these were the baubles that cost him his liberty! Had he never exceeded by one penny his income, that is to say, his scanty earnings, he need never have been a woman's debtor, and now, a woman's victim. As he reviewed the circumstances attending his intercourse with Mary Ann Harpfield, from the beginning, his whole being rose up in rebellion against the arch-tempter Greenbank. It was Greenbank who had egged him on to pay court to her from interested motives, to accept money loans from her—Greenbank who had hinted how acceptable he would be as a suitor, and he could see plainly that the concatenation of events which had made or seemed to make an offer of marriage obligatory, was of Greenbank's bringing about. The wreaking vengeance on this tempter had been perhaps one motive for self-destruction. Could he now only punish him in another way, he should feel, in a measure, braced up for the next day's ordeal. Hardly had the thought crossed his mind, when a man's figure crossed the lane, and the unmistakable soft, silvery tones of the converted prodigal greeted his ear.

"I was sure I could not be mistaken. What should a bridegroom elect do but listen

to the nightingales and hide himself amidst the wild roses? Well, I won't be so indiscreet as to trespass on your solitude, my dear fellow. To-morrow in the vestry I shall be among the first to wish you joy."

In the wrathful frame of mind Winn was, desiring nothing so much as to do his worst enemy some mortal injury, he yet retained his sanity; one sorry farce he had just covertly enacted, he did not wish to act another which might bring about unpleasant notoriety.

So, with his hat pulled on his brows and his lip set, as if nothing should force a word from him, he pushed past the intruder, fain to be rid of his presence.

"Come," Greenbank added, in the same jaunty, confidential tones. "Just one word, and I will leave you to your blissful dreams. This time to-morrow, Winn, you will be a rich man; all that is Philip Summerhill's is Mrs. Harpfield's, and all that is your wife's becomes yours. Don't in your prosperity forget an old friend, who has left not a stone unturned to serve you, to whom, I may indeed say, you in no small degree owe your coming good fortune."

Winn stopped short, then all the dark revengeful instincts came back again. To his exaggerating fancy, this man was not only the author of his shame and misery, but the preventer of his happiness. Greenbank's,

in forcing him to marry Mary Ann Harpfield, prevented him from marrying any one else.

"You villain," he cried, "you know as well as I do that this was all schemed to your own selfish ends. Why couldn't you earn an honest livelihood by breaking stones on the public roads, instead of playing these vile games? The devil might have let you go then! Yes, I owe my good fortune to you. You laid a trap for me, and, fool that I was, I walked straight into it with my eyes wide open. But not to your advantage—do you hear that? The poor little lad's heritage! whoever fattens on it, it shall not be you. Come to me years hence for a crust of bread and a night's shelter, and you will only get a curse for your pains. You know well enough that I never loved Mrs. Harpfield. Great God, what am I saying? You have made me hate her—hate her who to-morrow is to be my wife! Was it not devil's workmanship to bring any man and woman together on such terms, hatred on the one side, fancy, worldly ambition, Heaven knows what, on the other!"

Too consternated to speak, Greenbank would have edged his way past, but the other alertly barred the passage. The elder man was sluggish, of nervous temperament, and below the average in stature and strength; Winn, slightly built, but tall and muscular, a trained

athlete to boot, was a match for two such adversaries.

"I have not done yet," he said. "You have been let off far too easily all your life, it is high time you should get your deserts at last. Is it likely I care a straw what I do now? I am to marry Mrs. Harpfield to-morrow."

Again Greenbank made an effort to escape, but Winn clutched him with a grip of iron.

"Hear me out, you church-going, smooth-tongued, black-hearted dissembler. You don't break into folks' houses, rob, murder, and otherwise incur the hangman's rope or quarters in jail, but don't you think many a poor wretch who has had his neck broken within the prison walls, or plied the treadmill half a life-time, may have been a reputable character by comparison with yourself? One day's honest work, could you lay claim to so much! —I would not grudge you your attendance at church, your smooth appearance, your reputable character! Had you minded your own affairs, had you kept back your evil counsels, I could still say, go to church and welcome. Why did you contrive this marriage? Not to serve me, not to do me a good turn, but to curry favour with her, and to make sure of your share of the spoil. Is not murder a lesser crime than the disinheriting an orphan child under false pretences, the driving into idiocy a poor lad, whose natural faculties are

as good as yours or mine? But you have all mistaken your man; a fool I may be, blind I may be, a knave I am not, as you and your accomplices will find out to your cost."

"Let me at least say a word on my own behalf, let me explain matters a little," faltered the luckless Greenbank.

"Ah," Winn cried, with a cruel laugh, "you have been explaining matters with that smooth tongue of yours all your life; there comes a time when even such a friend can't stand you in good stead."

In a moment, without further warning, the horrified Greenbank saw himself, as he supposed, at the mercy of a maniac with loaded firearms in his hand. Winn had stealthily pulled out the hidden revolver, and, now holding his prisoner fast, presented it with apparently desperate intent.

Greenbank gasping for breath, trembling in every limb, could not so much as utter a cry for help. Perhaps that instant of agonised suspense, it was hardly more, might be called ample punishment for his wrong-doing, as far as Winn was concerned. The woods were hereabouts quite solitary, not a dwelling lay within earshot, not a husbandman lingered afield, and at such an hour a fearful murder had been committed some years before at that very spot; as if to add to the horror of the moment, the thunders of the tempest

were heard afresh, a vivid flash of lightning lit up the scene.

But the spectacle of his adversary's terror seemed now vengeance enough, and Winn, when himself, was in one sense no coward; he could not in a self-collected moment attack a defenceless man.

"Did you think I was going to waste as much as half an ounce of good lead upon you?" he said, with the greatest coolness. "You are very much mistaken. I am sorry I have half killed you with fright. Just keep out of my way for the future."

Then with pistol impocketed, he walked on.

That encounter had at least one good effect. It restored Winn's self-control, and improved his spirits. The motive for living was again as strong as ever; he would check-mate Greenbank, and purge the house of Mrs. Harpfield's tools and satellites. The more he thought of it, the more he chuckled over the adventure; to have determined to end his own career would ever remain a memory to blush for, but to have thoroughly frightened Greenbank was an achievement worthy of perpetual self-congratulation. By little and little the desperate look passed from his face, giving way to determination of another kind. His life, in one sense, was ruined; as far as the sweetness of home and all the mollifying influences of the fireside were

concerned, he was a lost man. But what remained called forth every particle of energy, every effort of will; indebted, beholden as he was to this woman, on the morrow to become his wife, he was going to become her master, and not on his own account, but on Nadine's, on Philip's. The struggle of the last few hours had left him in one sense weak, in another strong; he blushed, faltered, trembled before conscience, in other words, before Nadine, but already he was longing to assert his mastery over her enemy.

In such a mind as this the bridegroom prepared for his wedding-day.

CHAPTER XVII.

A RESURRECTION AND A REVELATION.

It was Mrs. Harpfield's wedding day, and but for old Betty, the charwoman, the young heir was left in the large, rambling old hall alone. Whilst every member of the household, in gala dress, had set out for the church and feast to be held at an hotel in the town, the event itself was kept from Philip's ears. He knew nothing of his Harpie's forthcoming marriage, he only wondered at her unusual elation of spirits, at Mr. Winn's frequent visits, and at an

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extraordinary arrival of milliners' boxes and packages of all sizes. Notwithstanding Winn's persuasions and entreaties, Mrs. Harpfield insisted upon the marriage taking place after conventional fashion. He had urged upon her the propriety of the registry office, but she gainsaid the proposition, ordering the most becoming toilet for a middle-aged bride that modesty could invent, an elegant little breakfast for the wedding party, and a second banquet for "the servants," as she now called Mr. Don and other old friends. Winn, conscious of much more serious differences of opinion to be combated hereafter, at last assented with a bad grace. So Philip was left alone.

The solitude of the exquisite summer day at first mystified and oppressed him. He wanted Tommy's company, or Fanny's, on an expedition to the watercress meadows and the hay-field.

When he had done puzzling himself over their absence, the sense of a few hours' absolute liberty brought exhilaration. In a dim, undefined way, he was conscious of having been kept a close prisoner since Nadine's departure. For some reason or other Mrs. Harpfield would now never let him quit the house alone, and the conviction that he was watched, dogged, and suspected, naturally made the boy suspicious in turn. The conspired against had become conspirator. The captive had begun

to plot against his jailors. Other circumstances, too, had changed him. The slender, sensitive, dark-eyed lad, who now stole out of the house with his beloved Euclid in his pocket, was not at all the Philip of two months ago.

Passionate sorrow is a wonderful sharpener of the faculties, and the double loss of Nadine, loss of his beloved protectress and companion, and of his intellectual ideal, marked the boundary between the boy's childhood and youth. He could no longer suffer or enjoy in the old way. The future now presented itself under a wholly different aspect. The first real grief of his life had done more, it had awakened in his hitherto pliant nature a will, and of that will, and the force that it might be in determining his future career, he was gradually becoming conscious. Mrs. Harpfield might bend him to her in little things, and might put every imaginable obstacle in the way of freedom, but some day or other, and by his own efforts, it would be his.

There was a sweet spot dear to him from recollections of Nadine, a little plantation of larch-trees, beyond vast stretches of field, set round with tall hedges and flowering banks, offering generous rest and shelter to the wayfarer.

Philip now found a cosy nook in front of a bean-field, and in spite of the bees and the butterflies, worked for some time in

earnest. Euclid had to be studied in secret, and he was determined to make the most of this lucky chance.

But at the end of that first industrious hour he began to grow lazy. Even to be able to ponder without a sentinel eye fixed upon him was a luxury; he would think instead, and of course his thoughts flew back to Nadine.

Oh! how could Harpie have linked her name with those fearful Russian crimes? How could he for a moment have weakly believed her? Only to find Nadine, to pour out all his grief, all his contrition at her feet! Only to see her once more, just once again!

Harpie said that she was gone, had been forced to return to her own country; she was implicated, so Harpie had tried hard to make him believe, in the odious plots that had lately filled the world with horror; was perhaps a close prisoner in a dungeon. Such were the stories he had been compelled to listen to, to seem to accredit; but whatever his apparent acquiescence might have been, he had never really trusted Harpie here.

How could he find Nadine, or devise any means of secretly communicating with her?

He knew what he should do were he a man and free, he should make the journey to Russia and seek her there; but he was barely fifteen, it was a long, a very long time to wait.

As these childishly sorrowful thoughts

passed through his mind, the very sweetness and joyousness of the summer but added to his despondency. Only one person in the world had ever really loved him, and he had lost her perhaps for ever.

Meantime the sweet scent of the bean-field, the humming of the bees, and the noon-tide sultriness made him drowsy. Pillowing his head on the warm grass, and covering his face, he soon fell asleep.

How long he had slept he did not know, but when he awoke, surely it was to dream again! Once more like the hero of Calderon's masterpiece, he was puzzled as to which was the reality and which the vision, in this strange existence.

It could not be! Yet if he must believe his eyes he saw her before him, the far-off, unreachable Nadine! There she sat, smiling into his face, clasping his hands in hers!

"Oh! Nadine, Nadine," he cried. "It is not true, then. You never went away."

"Just three miles as the crow flies," she replied, smiling. "But it might as well be three thousand, since Mrs. Harpfield is the spy upon us. I have tried again and again to see you, my poor Philip, but in vain."

The boy seemed beside himself with joy and wonderment.

"Let me go away with you to-day," he cried. "There is no one at home but old Betty, I should not be missed for hours."

She smiled negation, yet there was cheerful encouragement in her glance.

"We must have patience," she said; "but I come with good news for you. Mrs. Harpfield is to be married to-day to one who may prove your benefactor indeed—to Mr. Winn."

"Harpie—married—to—Mr.—Winn!"

"You may well look astonished, and I have something to tell you more surprising still. I could not let you into this secret whilst under Mrs. Harpfield's roof. I have now nothing to do with her. You are strong and well, and even if it were not so, you ought, you shall know the whole truth. Philip, did you never guess it? You are no poor foundling, dependent on Mrs. Harpfield for bread, but a rich man's son, and by evil chance she was made your guardian, and the steward of your fortunes."

It was little likely that Philip should take in the full meaning of these words at once. The Sigismund of Calderon's story, translated on a sudden from a dungeon to a throne, could not have looked more hopelessly mystified.

"You must have wondered at my dislike of Mrs. Harpfield, which I never attempted to conceal," Nadine went on. "I hated her from the beginning, and why? Because of set purpose she was despoiling and robbing a helpless child; nor did her diabolical schemes rest there. She was not content to cheat you out of your heritage only. But, Philip,

you are no longer a child, you never were the weakling she would have made others believe, you shall now know all. She wanted to let you grow up ignorant and helpless, so that when you should come to man's estate she could still do as she liked with your money. Why were you never allowed to learn what other boys do? Why were you kept to babyish games, and be given lessons fit for an infant school only? Because the faculties God has given you, the first, best gift we receive from Him, were to be stunted and dulled, and you were to live a life of perpetual vacuity and inanition. Could I help hating her when I saw all this?"

"I will hate her, too," replied the boy, beginning to realise the import of Nadine's passionate outburst, although as yet he was hating Nadine's enemy, not his own. The Harpie of his daily life could not so suddenly become the Harpie of her story.

"Do not think of inflicting injury on her; try to serve yourself," Nadine now urged, in calm, persuasive tones. "Try to be resolute, self-controlled, self-reliant, to be manly, honest, and true." She thought of Fanny Farthing, and added: "Above all, try to be dignified; never to do anything for which you need afterwards blush. Then, as time goes on, Mr. Winn will see that Mrs. Harpfield is wrong, and that I am right; he will insist upon justice being done you.

You will be sent to college, have money at your disposal, be free to follow any calling you choose."

"I shall live where you live."

She smiled, that encouraging, almost maternal smile of hers.

"And, meantime, don't forget that I'm staying three miles off, at Sir Vernon's. Did nobody tell you that when the half-drunken peasants treated me roughly at the show, Sir Vernon took me home in his carriage, and has given me shelter since?"

"They told me you had gone back to Russia. They said you were a Nihilist, and were shut up in prison for plotting against the Emperor. But I never believed a word of it."

"I hope not. And now, Philip, I must not stay any longer. Pray remember what I say. Do not hate Mrs. Harpfield; she nursed you and cared for you when you were a baby. Bear with her patiently for a little, just a little while longer. No good can come of resistance and rebellion now. Wait till you are able to stand up for yourself."

"When will that be?"

"When? When Philip Summerhill is a man."

She rose to go, and the lad's eyes filled with tears.

"Nobody cares what becomes of me but

you," he said. "Nor what I do. I haven't got on with Euclid a bit since you went away."

"Ask Mr. Winn to help you; and don't look unhappy, Philip, we shall be able to meet again, I feel sure of it. Mr. Winn won't let me carry you off with me to Russia; we can hardly expect that"—here she smiled cheerily—"but I feel sure he will be good to you—to us both."

She left him; and when the coolly-dressed figure, with the red sunshade, had disappeared behind the larch-trees, the lad's sadness passed, and a wholly new expression came over his face.

If sorrow is an awakener of the faculties, none the less so is the hatred born of injustice.

The world and life could never be the same to Philip Summerhill. Up to the present time, he had lived in ignorance of certain forms of evil, unconscious of many kinds of wrong. The newspapers—those nauseous doses of crime sweetened by gossip—were studiously withheld from him. Unless to suit Mrs. Harpfield's purpose, he never learnt what was going on in the outer world; whilst of practical matters he was allowed to remain as ignorant as a child in the nursery. It is therefore no wonder that he failed to realise at once the full purport of these disclosures. Misled

from earliest childhood as to his true position, he was hardly likely to be enlightened in a moment.

"You are my child, your poor mother begged me to take care of you; there was no one else to do it," had been Harpie's unvarying answer to any question upon the subject of his birth and parentage; and if he had been once or twice tempted to ask: "Have I no money?" the ready answer was: "Only what I choose to give you." As Philip now pondered on these things, by little and little the sense of Nadine's revelations became clear. It never occurred to him that all the luxury Mrs. Harpfield enjoyed was a direct robbery from himself, that he had been spoliated from the cradle; one notion, that clear as daylight he could grasp, his heritage was in her keeping, and only by force or craft could it be transferred to himself.

No wonder that vehement indignation and fierce wrath took possession of him, and that in the bosom of the hitherto passive boy there burned the vindictiveness of the strong man.

His first impulse—Heaven help him!—was of revenge. Nadine's exhortations to forbearance were straightway set aside, only the galling bitterness of her disclosure remained. But how could he revenge himself? That was the question. What could he do?

How could he behave so as to show his abhorrence?

Well, Harpie was away; not to return for several days, Fanny said; time enough for him to plot and connive before her return.

The bean-field shed yet sweeter and sweeter fragrance, the hum of bees and insects made yet softer summer music; far away the sweet dove's note might be heard, and farther still, aloft amid the fleecy white clouds, hung the skylark, as it seemed, no bird at all, instead some spirit voice enticed from heavenly abodes by the beauty and freshness of the flowery, fragrant June-crowned earth.

Philip lingered in the bean-field, surely as pathetic a figure as the sun shone on that perfect day; the slender, sensitive boy suddenly aroused from idle dreams and infantile pursuits, to a sense of manliness and responsibility. The child merged into the youth, all life's grave meaning made clear; and by what fearful agency? The thirst for vengeance.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SEEKING AN ALLY.

LATER in the afternoon the wedding guests returned. they had stolen a march upon Philip in the morning, but willingly allowed

themselves to be stared at now. Fanny dressed quite exquisitely, in the pale yellow so becoming to brunettes; Mr. Don in faultless morning attire; Tommy, with equal success, made to look like a beau in French comedy. Betty, the charwoman, and Lotty, the kitchen-maid, were now despatched hither and thither. Lotty, a raw country girl, permitted to look on at the wedding, without taking any part in it, regarded her fellow-servants as aristocrats of the first water.

Mrs. Harpfield being absent, the three immediately took possession of the drawing-room.

"Bring me a cup of tea with lots of cream, Lotty," cried Fanny, throwing herself into an easy-chair, and laying aside gloves and parasol.

"And fetch me a bottle of soda-water," said Mr. Don.

"Now, Lotty, look sharp; some coffee and bread and butter, please, I'm famished," was Tommy's order. Tommy being favoured with an appetite that never flagged.

Whilst Lotty flew hither and thither, Betty hobbling behind her, helping as best she could, Philip walked in large-eyed and surprised enough; but although his bosom swelled with indignation as he thought of Mrs. Harpfield, he felt no animus towards these three. They were also usurping his place, wasting his heritage, playing the same

guilty game. He did not as yet realise their complicity.

"Eh, you wonder where we have been, and what we have been doing in our fine clothes. Guess!" cried Fanny, the embargo of secrecy being now withdrawn.

"Guess who has been and gone and got married," bawled Tommy.

"My dear fellow, do not excruciate my ears with such abominable grammar," remonstrated the chef. "Surely the mere force of example might by this time have taught you the proper use of your mother tongue."

Tommy answered by an irreverent grimace, and caught hold of Philip's arm. In spite of his craving for coffee and bread and butter, the effect of the morning's champagne was not yet worn off.

"Shut your eyes and open your mouth, and see what I shall send you!" he said. "Just fancy then, young one, Mrs. Harpfield is now Mrs. Winn—Won it ought to be," and then he laughed vociferously at his own wit.

"We've got a master," put in Fanny.

"Say a new employer, for Heaven's sake," said Mr. Don. "The words master and mistress have long since been out of date, and offend the taste."

"Call him what you please, we needn't any of us be afraid of Mr. Winn. I for one could wind him round my little finger."

Meanwhile Philip had loosed himself from Tommy's hold, not because he felt conscious of any growing dislike to his former companion, but because he resented the familiarity. It was not Tommy's fault, nor Mr. Don's, nor Fanny's, that he was treated thus, the injustice was Harpie's. She should have told them all from the first that he was a gentleman's son, and the heir to a large property.

"Philip doesn't look as if he were going to fly up to the moon at the wonderful intelligence," Mr. Don said, eyeing the lad curiously, and not without suspicion.

"Why should I?" asked Philip.

"Why should you? Well, I am sure I see no reason why. It won't make much difference to *you*," answered the other, with bitter meaning.

"Nor to any of us, I say," blurted forth Tommy. "I guess Mrs. Harpfield will always be master and mistress both here. She's got the money."

A look came into Philip's face then, that all three must have understood had they not been too much occupied with their several trays. Mr. Don was methodically mixing his brandy and soda-water, Fanny pouring out tea, Tommy sugaring his coffee.

"Have some tea, do, Philip," Fanny said.

Since Nadine's departure a cover for the young heir had been always laid in the kitchen, his invitations to Mrs. Harpfield's table grow-

ing less and less frequent. To-day for the first time he resented the slight.

"No, thank you," he said, coldly. "Lotty can bring me some tea in the school-room by-and-by," and then he quitted the trio, all looking after him wonderingly.

"He's sulky because he wasn't invited to the wedding, and I do think it a shame, poor little fellow," said Fanny. "What harm could he have done?"

"Well, marry me, and we'll make up by giving him an invitation," laughed Tommy.

Mr. Don said nothing, but had evidently his own opinion on the subject.

When Fanny had finished tea and taken off her gala dress, she went straight to Philip. He had been confided to her charge during Mrs. Harpfield's absence, and the flighty, yet good-natured girl, compassionated him from the bottom of her heart.

A fraction more of decision and rectitude, ah! had Fanny possessed these, she might have been his friend indeed. But she was a butterfly in woman's form, hardly endowed with what could be called a conscience or sense of moral responsibility at all. Everybody knew what was right better than herself, she reasoned, always an easy method of shifting one's inner burdens. She opened the school-room door so softly that Philip was not at first aware of the intrusion. Then, elf-like, fay-like, she danced singingly towards the

table where he sat, and toyed with the locks of his brown head.

"What are you crying for, poor little boy?" she said, mimicking the tone of a nurse soothing a baby. "Don't 'oo cry, Harpie will come back again."

"Go away," Philip said, sullenly.

"I'm not going away till Philip is kind, I've always been kind to Philip," said the girl, half jestingly, yet with a touch of genuine feeling. "It is not my fault if Philip is miserable."

"That is true," the lad answered, dashing away his tears and shaking off his sombre mood. "But I have been out of doors all day; I don't want to go out any more, thank you."

"I did not come to invite you to a walk, but to show you something. Come with me," she said.

He obeyed willingly, for anything in the shape of distraction was welcome just then. Fanny led him to the new rooms which had lately been added to the house under Winn's direction. "You have never been here before," she said, taking a key from her pocket, "but you must have heard the upholsterers at work all last week. Now wouldn't you like, just for once, to sleep in such a room as that?"

She opened a door leading into Mrs. Harpfield's new bed-chamber, which, appro-

priate as it might have been in a palace and for a youthful bride, had a strangely incongruous look here. The lad gazed with glistening eyes, and lips wide apart, at splendour and luxury now witnessed for the first time. Pink silk bed-hangings; white lace curtains, festooned with pink ribbons; soft carpets in which the same colour—the colour of youth and love—predominated; couch and chairs cushioned with rose damask also; abundance of mirrors; wardrobes and cabinets of dainty inlaid wood. In this rosy bower a youthful princess might well have been content.

“Look here, and here, and here,” cried Fanny, as she led him from one object to another. “I wish I were Mrs. Harpfield; I wish I were rich.”

The childish thought made Philip wince; but he determined to conceal what was passing through his mind. Yet he was fain to try Fanny.

“Do you care more for Mrs. Harpfield than for me?” he asked.

“What a question! I am very fond of you—you know that; but we can’t help being fondest of those who do most for us; so, of course, Mrs. Harpfield—I shall never accustom myself to saying Mrs. Winn, I am sure—of course, Mrs. Harpfield has been my best friend—like a mother to me.”

“We never can tell who may one day

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be of the most use to us. Things change," Philip said, tentatively. "Suppose—suppose I were to become rich on a sudden."

"Then I should like you best," was Fanny's naïve answer. She was just then arranging her hair before the large, oval mirror on the mantelpiece, and did not notice Philip's look. The sharp, observant eye of Mr. Don would at once have seen what the boy was thinking of. Fanny's childish inconsequence annoyed him. Ah, Fanny Farthing could hardly be his friend and ally, she was, as everybody called her, a butterfly.

"When will Harpie be back?" he asked.

"Mr. and Mrs. Winn, you should say. This day fortnight, everything is to be in readiness for them. But don't you want to see the dressing-rooms?—little gems. Do come."

Philip glanced moodily at the two charmingly light and airy rooms leading out of the bed-chamber. Here again rose colour predominated, making the whole fairy-like and youthful. The decorators seemed to have had in their minds Cupid and Psyche, rather than plain, middle-aged Mary Ann Harpfield and her unromantic, unlover-like Francis Winn.

Philip thought of his own bedroom, with its bare, white-washed walls, uncarpeted floors, cracked looking-glass, curtainless windows, and again the terrible longing to be avenged

held him prisoner. He did not dwell upon the bright future yet, perhaps, in store for him—liberty, a varied existence, the life after his own heart. Such prospects were, for the moment, lost sight of. He thirsted for the punishment of her who was despoiling him of his heritage, and Fanny's words had set him thinking. A sudden impulse made her his confidant.

"Fanny," he said, "you know as well as I do, that I am master here; Harpie is only my nurse. If you wish to become rich, you must stand by me."

It was not in the girl's nature to be thunderstricken; a light ripple of laughter, an incredulous glance from her wide-open eyes, a half-contemptuous ejaculation, answered him.

"You cannot really be pleased that Mr. Winn married Harpie," the boy went on, feeling sure of his ground. "You are young and pretty, and she is old and ugly; he would have married you but for her money—my money. You guessed that long ago. But there is one thing you have never guessed, deep as you are. I am not going to be made a baby of any longer."

"Bravo!" cried Fanny at last, enthusiastically.

All gratitude, all allegiance to her protectress shrivelled to nothingness under Philip's careless, yet scathing sarcasm. She owned to herself now that she had once cared

for Winn, and that in her inmost heart she hated his bride.

Philip hastened to follow up his advantage.

"Just think for a moment, Fanny," he said; "I am fifteen and a half, in five years' time I shall be of age. Not a dozen Harpies can keep me from what is my own then. Help me now, and I will make over to you half of my fortune when I get it."

"And will you marry me, Master Philip?"

"No, Fanny, I cannot promise that. I shall never marry any one but——"

"Nadine!" screamed Fanny, anticipating him. "Foolish boy, she would as soon dream of marrying you as I should of marrying old Ted Wickens, who is just upon ninety. However, make up your mind to what you like. But tell me how I am to serve you, and how I am to be rewarded."

"I am not without money," Philip went on, eagerly. "Harpie lets me keep my money-box, it holds twenty pounds, I am sure. Then my gold watch, which was my father's, with the diamonds in the back, I have that, too, we can sell it, and she left me fifteen pounds for a bicycle—in a little note I have just found. Then there are many things we can take with us; the silver left out for use, it is all mine, my initials are on it, so I shall not be purloining; the goblet given me at baptism; any money we can find——"

"Bless the child, how he talks ! And what do you mean to do after ransacking the house ?"

"I am not joking, Fanny. If you will help me, I shall get away. We will get away together. We will go to Australia, anywhere you like, and there remain till I am of age and can claim my own."

"We cannot live upon air. Have you thought of that, Master Philip ?"

"I have thought of everything. You are so handy, you could earn a living anywhere, and I could get a clerk's place. You see," urged Philip, with tears starting to his eyes, "I don't mind where I go, or what I do, so long as I get away from Harpie and Mr. Winn. I used to be fond of him, Nadine has a good opinion of him still, but I despise him since he is married to Harpie. Think, Fanny, I have never deceived you, I am a truthful boy. I will make a solemn promise in writing to give you half my fortune——"

"A quarter would satisfy me. A thousand pounds would be enough," Fanny rejoined. She did not feel half certain that he was serious about the matter, but it distracted, it amused her, and, somehow, service under Mr. Winn wore a very different aspect to service under Mrs. Harpfield. Her notions of right and wrong, too, even of the haziest, left her neutral, free to follow the impulse of the moment, to be loyal, disloyal, or generously mean. The more she thought of it—if think-

ing in the proper acceptance of the word were possible to so shallow a nature—the stronger seemed Philip's case, and he continued heaping argument upon argument till insubordination and trickery wore the semblance of a positive duty. Nor were selfish motives wanting—a lazy life, plenty of dainties, excessive wages, these, but no more than these, could she expect from her too easy, yet sharp-tongued benefactress; Philip, on the contrary, would, or rather might, one day, have it in his power to make her a rich woman. And she was young, light-hearted, fond of change. The prospect of a journey to Australia, a journey anywhere, flattered her imagination.

"I don't say that I will, or that I won't," she replied. "I never felt more disposed to play the truant in my life, but we will see what to-morrow brings forth."

"There is another thing to consider," Philip urged. "Nadine and Mr. Winn between them will fight my battle for me although I am away. I may have the thousand pounds for you long before I am a man."

Nadine and Winn! Justice incarnate pleading for Philip on the one hand, kindness of heart and good intentions on the other. Fanny's inconsequent mind recognised the new forces arrayed against Mrs. Harpfield. She began to ask herself if,

after all, in abetting Philip's schemes, she should not play a winning game. The proposal, audacious as it had seemed at first, when looked at steadily in the face, was not only feasible, but warranted by circumstances and self-interest.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BREAKING UP OF THE CAMP.

THE morrow brought forth as many surprises as a conjuror's table.

By half-past five o'clock the household was in a flutter, Mr. Don's loud ring and volley of orders having taken every one's breath away. Lotty was to prepare his breakfast at once, eggs and bacon, and grilled bone and anchovy toast, and strawberry jam ; Fanny to put together the fancy shirts, new socks, and pocket-handkerchiefs entrusted to her for marking ; Tommy, having blacked the great man's boots and fetched down his portmanteau, was to bring round the dog-cart at seven o'clock precisely.

When, an hour later, he descended to the dining-room, in a fashionable gray travelling suit, with a light dust-coat on his arm, he merely explained to the admiring little group, Fanny, and Tommy, and Lotty, that

as there was nothing on earth for him to do, he had made up his mind to visit Baden-Baden.

"You will take care of the youngster while I am away," he said, as he somewhat pompously handed each a small present of money. "Fanny will forward my letters—here is an address—and I am sure you will all behave exactly as if my eyes were upon you." Finding himself alone with Fanny, he added, in a low, mysterious tone: "I am not so very sure of my movements in the future. You see, my good girl, I have been as good as master here, and, unless I very much mistake matters, that young man intends to be both master and mistress. Not that I have any objection to Mr. Winn as Mr. Winn; but I prefer quitting with dignity to being kicked out of the house."

"The place won't be the same without you," said Fanny, in all sincerity, although her brain was busy.

"It won't be the same, anyhow," was the sententious reply. "I may tell you in confidence, Fanny, that I once flattered myself that I understood your sex. The fond delusion is over. I am as much at a loss as if I held in my hands a fossil bone, and were asked to describe the creature it belonged to. If there was one person on earth who owed me a debt of gratitude, that person you know."

"I always hoped Mrs. Harpfield would marry you, I did indeed," said Fanny.

"Do not misunderstand me, for Heaven's sake; there was no sentiment in the case. I do not believe there is a vestige of sentiment in my composition.

"Oh! Mr. Don."

"You speak as if it were a Christian virtue, instead of a weakness. But that is not to the point. What I would whisper in your ear—confidentially, of course—is that Mrs. Harpfield—I beg her pardon, Mrs. Francis Winn—has disappointed me. Her ingratitude has freed me from every obligation. And, of course, the game is up now."

He glanced round, and went on speaking cautiously:

"With Philip, I mean. I for one knew it must come to that sooner or later. The boy is sound as an apple both in body and mind, and always was but for fainting fits she pretended to be something serious. I saw all along that she was deluding herself, and that the little fellow's fortune would never be hers to fool away as she pleased, nor would it have been hers to do that had she married me. To despoil an orphan, to keep a fellow-creature from his own—I hope you don't believe me capable of such baseness?"

"You have always been kind to Philip, I am sure," Fanny cried.

Mr. Don positively blushed, the praise giving him by no means unmixed pleasure.

"We are the shuttlecocks of fate, the creatures of circumstance," he added, "and I dare say if I had not stayed here, somebody else would have been in my place, getting higher wages—a higher salary, I should say—and cheating through thick and through thin into the bargain. No, what can I reproach myself with? But I hear the dog-cart. Well, good-bye, be good children all of you. Give my love to Philip, and tell him he may use my fishing-rod."

Fanny was far from astute, but she needed no more in the way of explanation. The matter became clear as daylight. Mr. Don had taken final leave of Mrs. Harpfield's service, leaving her only Tommy and Lotty to deal with. Before she could mature her plans, Tommy returned, now pompous and imposing as the *chef* himself.

"Lotty," he ordered, "tell Jem" (a lad employed in the garden) "to put on his best clothes and get the luggage-cart ready at once. He is to drive me to town and bring the trap back." Then, turning to Fanny, he added, explanatorily: "I am just going to Portsmouth to see the Review. Jem will do my work whilst I am away, and you will take care of Master Philip."

"Of course," Fanny replied, her heart bounding at the intelligence. "Don't hurry

back; you so seldom take a holiday. I should make it a week or ten days, if I were you."

"I don't say that I shall not. And we haven't Mr. Greenbank to spy upon us. He went off last night to Boulogne, for I met his landlady, and she told me so. He always goes to foreign parts at this time of year," Tommy added.

Another piece of good news for Fanny. And sure enough, in half an hour's time, Tommy came downstairs, like Mr. Don, dressed in a new summer suit, in one hand a neat travelling-bag, with the other taking friendliest leave.

"Good-bye, Fanny; good-bye, Lotty; I'll bring you each something pretty from Portsmouth. Jem will help Master Philip with his rabbits. I wish I could have taken him—Master Philip, I mean—but Mrs. Harpfield would not approve. Mind and don't be dull without me. Enjoy yourselves."

Away he drove in the highest spirits.

"You might just as well go home for a week or two," Fanny said, turning to Lotty. "There is really nothing for anybody to do here."

"Oh, Miss Fanny, how kind of you! It so happens, too, my brother is going to be married at Colchester next week, and I wanted to go to the wedding, but did not like to ask you, as you would be alone."

"Old Betty will come in every day to do

your work ; you can get ready and start when you like. Here is a little present for you," Fanny said, slipping half-a-sovereign into the girl's rough hand. "And, Lotty, when passing through the village tell the carrier to call. I have to send some boxes of Mrs. Harpfield's to London."

No sooner was Lotty fairly out of the house, than Fanny took Philip into her confidence.

"Things have turned out wonderfully for us," she began. "Can you believe your own senses ? They are all gone, Mr. Don, Tommy, Lotty. We two are alone in the house, and can go when we please, and take what we please, for we cannot get to Australia without money."

"Can we really, really get away ?" asked Philip, a little dazed at the unhopd-for success.

"Now, Master Philip, don't hang back when I have arranged everything in my own mind so nicely. I should like to see the Antipodes : no matter what a girl may be, she has no chances in the old country. But I must not lose a minute. You see about your rabbits. Ask Betty to give them board and lodging for the present. Say you don't want the bother of them whilst Tommy is away. Now do."

"My poor rabbits, if we could only take them," sighed Philip.

"They would be terribly sea-sick. No, Master Philip. Give Betty a sovereign from your money-box; she'll treat them as if they were princes. But as I say, I can't stay a moment.'

It was highly characteristic of Fanny that her demeanour to Philip had become suddenly respectful, or at least what she intended to be respectful. The lad's altered attitude changed their relations. He was no longer a nonentity, but a power: could he be induced to play his new part to the end, her own fortunes were made.

She now set to work to fill two large trunks with everything of value she could lay hands on, taking care to appropriate Philip's heirlooms only. First were stowed away a goodly store of necessaries for the voyage, the Irish linen and damask marked with his father's initials. Then she collected such valuables as belonged to him past doubt: the plate that bore his paternal crest; his mother's dressing-case with silver fittings, which had a place of honour in Mrs. Harpfield's bedroom; the quaint old French timepiece from her mantelpiece, with silver-gilt frame; the antique hand-mirror also set in silver; the costly opera-glass, and objects innumerable that could easily be turned into money. They should not be sold, of course, unless absolutely necessary; but it was well to provide against uncertainties, and one and all

were Philip's, he but took final possession of his own. Money no more than money's worth was wanting, for like most stewards of other people's fortune, the mistress of Reedmere Hall abhorred spare. An extravagant sum left for housekeeping expenses during the next three weeks, a twenty-pound note left for general rejoicings to welcome home bride and bridegroom, besides sundry loose sovereigns left for nothing in particular, made Fanny's purse heavy. When the business of packing up was fairly over, she came to the conclusion that Philip's capital in valuables and money could hardly fall short of five hundred pounds. The cases were despatched by carrier to the railway station, thence to be forwarded to London, next her own box and Philip's trunk were packed. Betty was coolly informed that she was going to take Master Philip away for a little change, and was begged to remain in temporary charge. Soon after sunrise on the morrow the pair were steaming towards Harwich, bound for the capital, the world, and freedom!

CHAPTER XX.

FREE!

How glorious, how interminable seemed that first real day of freedom to the too happy

boy ! His heart bounded, his pulses throbbed quickly, he seemed to tread on air. His imprisonment had been soft, even luxurious, but it galled all the more. Now he belonged to himself, and not only fellow-beings but every object interested him from a wholly different point of view. Hitherto he had glanced at the world wistfully as some poor cripple watching athletic sports, or dwarf beholding gallant feat of arms. To-day he envied none, he felt the equal of all.

Exhilarating as is the pleasure-trip from Ipswich to Blackwall, it may prove the touch-stone of certain physical powers. Just as an examination thins academic ranks, weeding out the incompetent, the unprepared, or the timid, so this voyage of a day is the ordeal of the landsman's powers. When the steamer gaily sighted Landguard Fort and Bawdsey Ferry, the decks were crowded with laughing holiday folks ; as by little and little the level, lake-like expanse was exchanged for dancing waves and angry breakers, the number of lookers-on gradually diminished, soon not more than half-a-dozen passengers remaining above.

The weather was perfect, light clouds flecking the pale blue sky ; the sea, never warm in hue off these northern shores, sparkling in the sunshine, it was as if showers of diamonds were scattered over undulations of pearl, the silvery foam beautifully contrasted with the deep, greenish gray under wave ;

myriads of sea-birds flashed hither and thither, their white wings dropping like flakes of crystal spar upon the far off surface of brilliant, malachite green.

Fanny and her charge, both admirable sailors, both disposed to make acquaintances, soon found themselves on friendliest terms with a fellow-passenger, one of the few bearing them company. He was a tall, well-dressed, gentlemanly man, with a pleasant smile, and an almost childlike simplicity and openness of manner. There was one circumstance about him that might have repelled some, but lent additional interest to their new acquaintance in the eyes of these two. The complexion of the stranger was jet-black. He was a pure-blooded African.

Notwithstanding Fanny's inexperience and want of worldly wisdom, she possessed in no small degree the feminine instinct of self-preservation, which so often does duty for both. She felt, intuitively, that here was a nature guileless as Philip's own, benevolent as that of Sir Vernon himself, the kindly old magistrate being the ideal of virtue in the neighbourhood of Reedmere. Philip also felt drawn towards this denizen of another world; the inhabitant of another sphere could hardly have more impressed his imagination. The boy, too, having been brought up after wholly abnormal fashion,

had no rules of conduct, much less a code of etiquette to abide by.

It seemed to him just as natural, just as much a matter of course to fraternise with his dusty-skinned fellow-traveller as with Tommy.

"How rough the sea is, and what a capital sailor you are, Mr.—what am I to call you?" exclaimed Fanny, after a few introductory phrases.

"Walter O'Meara, that is my name," replied her interlocutor, proudly.

"A very pretty name—don't you think so, Master Philip?"

"I had the choosing of it, so I thought I might as well take a pretty one when I was about the business."

"Dear me, how stupid of me to forget!" Fanny said, crimsoning with self-reproach. "I ought not to have asked your name, of course," she added, hoping he would understand her apology.

"Ah, that choosing a name," the stranger went on, not in the least ruffled, "you have no idea the trouble it cost me. You see, there was only one name I really wanted, and that I could not take had I cried my eyes out; of course you can guess what it was?"

"Prince of Wales—Saint Paul? Alfred the Great—Christopher Columbus?" cried Fanny and Philip in a breath.

"I could have called myself any of these; what was to prevent me, I should like to know? But the other, millions would not buy it for me. Well, here is a clue for you, 'twas the name of a woman."

"Maid of Orleans?" cried Philip, to whom Nadine had read the story of Jeanne d'Arc.

"Lord, no. Who on earth was she?" said Mr. O'Meara, somewhat contemptuously. "The name I mean is known to the uttermost ends of the earth."

"Queen Victoria?" Fanny put in, triumphantly.

Again Mr. O'Meara smiled with a lofty air.

"I've nothing to say against Queen Victoria, except that she wasn't—she wasn't, and now she never can be—Harriet Beecher Stowe!"

"Was that lady a relation; were you very fond of her?" asked Philip, hesitatingly. To-day, for the first time, he heard the great woman's name.

"I'm done. That beats me. Never heard of Harriet Beecher Stowe, young gentleman? I'm blowed, I'm blowed!"

"Master Philip has not read 'Uncle Tom's Cabin;' I have," Fanny replied. Then feeling bound to apologise for Philip's ignorance, she added, "He has always been delicate."

Philip looked sadly disconcerted.

"We will buy that book as soon as ever

we reach London, Fanny. What was it about ; why should you be in such raptures with it ?” he asked, turning to his new friend. But Mr. O’Meara could only tap his knees with his fingers, and ejaculate, as he rolled his eyes, “ I’m blowed, I’m blowed ! ”

“ It is a very pretty story—“and all about the poor slaves,” was on Fanny’s lips, but she hastily recollected herself—“all about the poor people working in the sugar plantations, and their masters.”

“ You don’t half tell it. A pretty story ? Look you, young mister ; that woman I speak of, sitting in shawl, petticoat, and gown like any other, with a pen and a potful of ink before her, did what the prophet Jeremiah and St. John on Patmos couldn’t do, both of them put together ; what the Bible and Testament couldn’t do. She freed us poor slaves, every male, female, and sucking babe of us. Why am I a gentleman, whilst my poor father and mother were sold like sheep in the market-place and flogged till the blood ran down ? ”

“ So you are a gentleman ? ” Fanny observed, complacently, that piece of information making Mr. O’Meara still more interesting in her eyes.

“ I am steward on board one of the biggest steamers crossing the sea ; if that is not being a gentleman, I don’t know what is. I have had stewards under me, white men, young gentlemen like yourself,” he added, turning to

Philip. "They work out their passage in this way; the last under me was related to a nobleman. That was on the Australian line. Is it not enough to make father and mother dance jigs and sing Hallelujah in their grave-clothes? Poor souls, I laugh and cry till I am three parts demented when I think of it."

Thereupon the speaker burst into uproarious laughter; the next moment, sobbing as if his heart would break, he jumped up and danced before them, then reseated himself, weeping piteously. Fanny laughed and cried out of sympathy; Philip looked on, wide-eyed.

"We think of taking a sea voyage," began Fanny. "When does your steamer start, and where do you go this time?"

"I have now changed my service. I like to see the world and learn new lines of business. I am now not number one, but number three on a great New York ship, carrying a thousand souls, sailing next week. Altogether a different kind of thing, more style about it. You wouldn't know me in my splendid uniform, tie and waistcoat white as snow, shirt-front like satin, blue jacket with bright buttons, and trousers to match."

"Why shouldn't we go to New York instead of to Australia?" Fanny said, turning to Philip. Then she added, explanatorily, "My young master will go first-class and I second, unless I could get engaged as a stewardess."

"Have you a first-rate character?"

"My face is my character," Fanny replied.

"You wouldn't require another, if the captain were choosing a wife," was the gallant answer, as the speaker surveyed the distractingly pretty face beside him. If ever any woman looked the impersonation of May, it was Fanny then; no meadow flower, amid spring-tide greenery, fresher, fairer than this airy sylph in her light gold-green dress and veil. Fanny possessed that purity of complexion and delicacy of tone that were only enhanced by the bright colours with which she loved to adorn herself. She seemed, indeed, like certain beauties, to invent colours, blues, pinks, and greens that had never been seen before, yet were millinery any one else could buy. Mr. O'Meara gazed and gazed.

"With a stewardess, you see, the matter is altogether different," he went on. "She must answer so many questions. Can she keep her feet when the ship stands on its beam-ends? Is she warranted never to scream, faint, or have a cold in her head? Fifty more. But we will see about it when we get to Liverpool. I suppose you intend to stay a few days in London. Where do you put up?"

Fanny named a lodging in Myddelton Square, Pentonville, at which she had once spent a week's holiday with Mrs. Harpfield and Tommy.

"Too far from everything," urged her informant. "I can tell you of a sweet place much handier—a delightful little villa at Bow; such a garden, you might fancy yourself on a burning hot day in the middle of a wood. It is a Temperance Home for respectable females and families; single gentlemen like myself are not admitted. You couldn't be better off. A very religious place, too—are you religious?"

"I could be if I tried, I dare say; anyhow for a week."

"Then do try. You have heard of the great Mission House, you will be near that. We can attend the services together; they are lovely. And I shall have time to show you some of the sights," Mr. O'Meara added, alertly. "Unfortunately I am a bachelor; I've no wife and children to look after when ashore."

"How is that?" Fanny asked, with captivating interest in her new acquaintance.

"You may well ask. The truth is, I have been unlucky; always just too late, just too early, just too something or other. There was a nice girl at the Temperance Home last year, with blue eyes and fair hair, might have been your sister. We were the best of friends, I could see that she liked me; but would you believe it, she had promised to keep her brother's house, somewhere in the bush; couldn't possibly marry,

she said, till he was first settled, and she didn't in the least know when that would be. Then there was another, her name was Rose, and a rose she was, I almost broke my heart about her; cheeks like ripe apples, hair yellow as a sovereign, lips red as tomatoes. She was a help at the Evangelical minister's, the one who looks after the Home; we used to sit side by side o' Sundays, we went to missionary meetings and Bible readings together. But no luck for me. She had a twin-sister, she couldn't be parted from her even for a husband, she said. Then there was Jane—but I won't go through the list, it makes me melancholy to think of such nice girls, just to my taste, I to theirs, but always something in the way. Well, things will come right in time. I am sure there's an English girl destined for me. I shall wake up some fine morning and find myself a happy husband and proud father, half-a-dozen little ones running about me."

"Would they be black or white?" Philip asked, innocently.

"I don't suppose I should ever notice. You see, it is all one and the same thing when you think of it," philosophically reasoned the head steward. "The Almighty gave some of us a dark skin, and others a fair one, but men are men and women are women, each with a soul of their own, for all that. And, I often think of it, were we all blind, born

without eyes, none of us would ever have been the wiser."

"Of course," said Philip.

"Of course," echoed Fanny.

And for a time the trio lapsed into silence.

CHAPTER XXI.

JUNE AND DECEMBER.

"WHY," asks the poet philosopher, Jean Paul, "should love in old age ever appear fit subject for mirth? Why should not the life of love, ever with good men a spiritual thing, born of their inner nature, endure as long as that inner nature itself? Is it indeed laughable when an aged eye betrays the sweetest recollections of youth? Not so, and were it bedewed with tears half of joy and half of retrospection, that emotion were pardonable also. Shall then, forsooth, no aged hand press that of youth with the thought, I also have been in Arcadia, in me too Arcadia lives still! Youth—youth of the spirit is eternal, and eternity is youth. Love, like the ambrosia of the poets, gives strength and immortality."

That "yet," dropped so tentatively and hesitatingly from Sir Vernon's lips some weeks before, still awaited explanation. Nadine

guessed his meaning as any woman similarly placed must have done, but courted silence. Meantime the daily life under his roof wholly changed. Instead of retrospection, all was now cheerful looking forward. Sir Vernon, no longer setting his house in order for his final solemn departure, busied himself with renovation and changes, faced up the prospect of happy years to come. The first step in this direction was to be measured for a new suit of clothes. Since his wife's death, three years before, the old baronet had not so much as purchased himself a pair of slippers. The largest and most aristocratic landowner in the neighbourhood had fallen little by little into a tatterdemalion condition. Of what use were new clothes to a man standing on the verge of the grave? he reasoned. He no longer went into society—what mattered how he dressed for bench or his solitude at home? His visitors of late years, few and far between, had gradually grown accustomed to seeing him in slippers frayed out at the heels, an alpaca coat faded from black to green, and showing fringes at the elbows, and pantaloons equally the worse for wear.

All on a sudden he took it into his head to give the tailor an order, and after three years' neglect of personal appearance, showed as much impatience to possess himself of an outfit as a boy about to be breeched. With the *naïveté* of old age which seems like a

recurrence of childhood, he would have Nadine's opinion on every separate article. Was the cut of the coat good ; did she think the cloth of the pantaloons of the right colour ; the waistcoat right in the matter of buttons ? Having refurnished his wardrobe, he turned his attention to the house.

"The carpets and curtains certainly look faded," he said one day. "Had my poor wife lived we were going to smarten up the place from top to bottom, and really, although it seems perhaps somewhat late in the day, something must be done ; I will get you to write for patterns, and be sure to mention light, cheerful colours. What do you say to blue ?"

Nadine tried to say as little as possible. The "yet" still remained hypothetical, and, under the circumstances, she felt that she could not be too reticent.

Much to her consternation, Sir Vernon ordered a vast supply of upholstery from London : delicate blue satin curtains ; French tapestry carpets, with sofa and chair covering to match ; painters and decorators were set to work, host and guest being compelled to take refuge in the room looking on to the pump.

"The rooms have never been turned out since my wife's death," he said. "The servants were always worrying me about spring cleanings and so forth, but I lent a

deaf ear. I had grown tolerably accustomed to dust and cobwebs, they seemed a fitting preparation for the change before me, the mouldy tenement of the grave. But, after all, many men live to be twenty years older than I am, and it is just as well to be cheerful and encourage trade whilst we are alive. You being a learned young lady are doubtless familiar with the famous aphorism from Horace, 'Every penny spent on your own dear soul is so much wrenched from your greedy heirs.' My heir is a worthy man enough, but already too rich by half; were not the estate entailed, I should not dream of burdening him by an additional penny; my property should go to charity or——"

That "or," like the "yet" of some weeks before, was left unexplained.

"It is the curse of this country," he went on, "that a man can't do as he likes with his own, or what seems his own. The owners of entailed estates are so many Prime Ministers; our successors are generally the very last persons in the world we would choose to come after us, and we can't help ourselves. Old-fashioned as I am, I don't hold with the doctrine of privilege. The good things of this life should go to those who deserve them."

Next the upper storey was taken in hand, and here a more delicate matter had to be broached.

"I don't know how you regard such matters, perhaps you have hardly as yet reflected on them," he said. "But when my poor wife died, I firmly believed that I should always miss her as I did then, and it seemed to me that it would be very wrong to do otherwise. It is wisely ordained that, although we do not forget, we remember less painfully. We must consort with the living rather than with the dead. I don't wish to efface any recollection of my wife from the place, but I think some of the knickknacks might now be removed, and her rooms turned out and freshened up. I wish you would glance round and give me your opinion."

Here, again, how could Nadine ever so delicately interfere? She knew as well as any amount of explanation could have told her, what this hint meant; yet, in this stage of affairs it was impossible to say: What can the appointment of the rooms matter to me; why should I be consulted?

Sir Vernon's apparent faith in her indifferent, almost cold acquiescence, saddened her. She did her best to undeceive him; talked, whenever he would let her, of her future career as a physician, of her return to Russia, of a dozen plans in which life under his roof played no part.

As Nelson feigned a deaf ear to obnoxious orders, so the old man pretended not to hear

or to understand. His kindness, his consideration, his devotion, made the task of unravelment all the harder, and his loneliness also.

The typical Englishman stands, in one respect, apart ; unlike his Teutonic and Gallic neighbour, he can live alone. Once that close fireside life with the companion of forty and odd years cut short, Sir Vernon had allowed himself to drift into almost complete isolation.

In his wife's lifetime the pair had given dinner-parties, and, whilst health permitted, gone into society. But of late the once cordial world seemed to have forgotten him. One by one his contemporaries had dropped off. Of near kindred he possessed none ; wider and more liberal in his views than most of his neighbours, he had never been exactly what is called popular. Nadine might now almost be called his sole society. Gradually, too, he had introduced her to his sparse visitors.

"Miss Nadine Norloff, kindly acting as my amanuensis," he would say. Her absence of self-consciousness, and quiet dignity, excluded gossip and flippant surmise. Not of such stuff are worldly-minded coquettes made—the very last woman, this, to pay court to an old man for his wealth, was the universal verdict passed upon her.

These intrusions were few, especially at this time of the year, when all who possessed beautiful country houses, chose to transport themselves to London. The pair were mostly left to themselves.

That last task she would fain have put off indefinitely. It seemed little short of sacrilege in a stranger to undertake it, but Sir Vernon insisted. His wife's most valuable trinkets had been bequeathed by will, he said; high time to do something with what remained. It was not fair that an accumulation of personal belongings should go under the auctioneer's hammer, he added, "and if there is anything you take a fancy to, pray accept it. To whom could such souvenirs go with a better grace, than to one who has been so kind to me?"

Nadine excused herself from accepting anything, but the business had to be got through before Sir Vernon would rest satisfied; each article held up for his inspection, every shelf and drawer emptied, the contents finally made up in parcels, and labelled for donation. Then followed the process of lining and lavendering drawers; and the rooms were cleaned and partly refurnished as the others had been.

And at last, when all these preparations were made, and the house looked as if made ready for a bride, Sir Vernon recurred to that unexplained "yet."

"Tell me," he said, when they had forsaken the dismal little study, looking on to the pump, for the bright drawing-room, with its views of terraced flower-garden and park. "What in Heaven's name could have put it into your head to study medicine? I think you told me that you are possessed of means; it is not, then, from the necessity of earning daily bread."

Nadine smiled; the thought struck her how little liking, even affection, has to do with uniformity of opinion on serious things. How could she make her old friend understand, much less appreciate the guiding principle of her life?

"I shall never be able to explain satisfactorily—to you, I mean."

"Try," he replied, encouragingly.

She reflected for a moment, and decided to tell him the whole truth. Half truths not only imply a want of confidence in our listeners, but in ourselves. If we have real faith in our own opinions and doctrines, we shall, at all risks, try to make them clear. She knew that she should hurt Sir Vernon's prejudices, perhaps shock him not a little, but she, nevertheless, decided to conceal nothing, and in such explanations she fancied she saw a loophole of escape. In answering his questions, she should also be answering that tentative "yet."

"Remember," she began, looking at him

meaningly, "I am a Russian — a Russian before all things."

"But not a Nihilist, not a conspirator, I am sure," he replied. "So pass on, if you please."

"Nay, a Russian is not summed up in these two epithets, a Nihilist or a conspirator; one may belong to my nationality and yet to another category. I am, then, a Russian and a woman, and these names are often synonymous for ambition."

"A mere will-o'-the-wisp, my dear. Leave men to be hocus-pocused by it. What good on earth could ambition do you?"

"There are more ways than one of being ambitious. I am sure, Sir Vernon, you will approve of the desire to be of use in the world, and to make the most of one's faculties."

"Of course, of course," was the fidgety reply. Sir Vernon was beginning to fear what these derogations were about to lead to. "But the home, Miss Nadine, the home should surely be the sphere of a woman's faculties."

"When a woman so wills it. Yet if the responsibilities of my sex ended there, how much work, and often good work too, were left undone! The career of a woman-doctor always seemed to me to have something apostolic about it; so much misery exists in the world which only good women can alleviate. The ministrations of sisterhood to sisterhood, of the rich and happy, which

seem a sect apart to the starving and wretched—is not here a sphere outside the home, and to some of us perhaps more attractive?”

“Ought it to be so? Can any duties be said to stand before those of wife and mother?” asked Sir Vernon, his old-fashioned notions as much disturbed by such views as by the preaching of Nihilism itself. “Come, my dear young lady, you are of a reflective turn, you have seen something of the world, you are in the habit of observing for yourself. Just dwell on your proposition for a moment. What would become of the world, I mean of human society, if once medical and other careers were held more attractive by your sex than wifehood and motherhood?”

“I don’t think we find such a beatitude around us as to justify acquiescence in the present state of things,” Nadine replied, sadly. “Initiative seems to me to wear the look of a moral obligation. Some of the most crying evils of the day may, perhaps, be due to the excessive sacrifice of womanly duty to the fireside. I ought, perhaps, to have used the word magnetic; some women are certainly magnetised towards especial careers of self devotion and benevolence. They forsake the beaten tracks of domestic life simply because they cannot help themselves.”

“I hope you don’t feel that magnetic influence?”

“Oh, why hope that?” Nadine cried,

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carried away by enthusiasm, unmindful of the answer such an appeal must surely provoke.

"Why?" rejoined the baronet, blushing like a girl. "Because I want you to stay with me. I am old," he added, in a trembling voice. "Is not that in your eyes rather a reason for staying than going? You spoke of alleviating misery just now, but surely to be old and lonely is affliction, too. Nadine, stay with me. A few years more and you will yet have, in all probability, a long career before you; why, then, grudge me a little happiness?"

Nadine's pained look told him all and more than her lips could utter. He still pleaded:

"Think, my dear, what would become of me should you go away now. I have grown accustomed to you, to happiness. As my wife I hope you could be happy, too. Old age is not youth, I know, but it is more trustworthy, calmer, wiser; you should at least have nothing to regret, nothing to reproach me with, in every respect my wishes should bend to yours. And when I am taken away, would not the recollection of having so sweetened my last years, sweeten yours also? You could ever think of me as one whose Providence, whose guardian angel you had been. Take, then, my name, an honoured one, as you know, and accept from me—you

are disinterested, I do not, therefore, speak of worldly advantage, I leave out the fortune with which I would endow you—all the love I have to give, not to be despised, believe me, because it is not the first love of youth."

"I am a Russian," began Nadine, passionately, "and when I have said that, I have said all. I spoke of women being magnetised towards some especial calling just now, but how feeble is such a spell compared to that of patriotism? If as a woman, I feel moved to solace the wretched, how much more must the sorrows of my own people touch me? Could I shut my eyes to the true state of things or believe in my incompetence to help, I could be idle and happy here. But I cannot despair, and hope means effort. Every faculty I possess, all my strength and energy belong by right to my country. I must go back to Russia."

"Not to mix yourself up in Nihilists' schemes, for God's sake," put in Sir Vernon, gloomily. "Promise me that; although," he added, in a despondent voice, "whatever happens, you will seem dead to me."

"I will write."

"Letters, letters! You are kind; but letters are like fairy tales, we lose our interest in them when we grow old. Half an hour's chat, a cheerful how d'ye do, is worth a score of them. No, you will go back

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to Russia, and I shall quietly betake myself to the grave, with no one to shed as much as a single tear for me."

He leaned back in his arm-chair, and she saw that he was weeping.

"Dear, kind friend," she said, on the point of giving way, too, "I wish I could make you see that I am not wholly free to choose."

"You have no lover—you are not engaged?" he asked, starting up, perusing her face intently. Was this lofty-minded Nadine indeed a coquette like any ordinary woman?

"My love is given to my country and her would-be defenders," she replied. Then after a time, added slowly, shaken with emotion: "There was one to whom I was all in all, the ideal, the teacher of my youth, the lover of my girlhood; he is dead to me, to all who love him, and his living death makes me indifferent to everything but the cause for which he suffers."

She burst into tears, and throwing herself on the floor beside him, knelt by his chair, looking up with a far-off, unreachable expression of loneliness and sorrow.

"You have often wondered that I should be so unlike other girls, so absorbed in matters of no personal concern; it is suffering that has changed me, I have his memory perpetually before my mind. He was called an Anarchist, a Nihilist, though innocent of every-

thing but a desire to befriend his country. How can I forget, how can I stay here to enjoy life with you?"

The old man's hand strayed to her fair head and rested there, stroking the soft hair fondly; a mild triumph lit his eye. She was free, then; in one sorrowful sense she was his own?

"Let me not make you unhappy," he murmured; "we won't talk about these things any more now. At any rate, you will stay with me a little while longer."

But the tide of passionate remembrance let loose, Nadine could not stem at will. Shaken with sobs, she replied:

"You cannot understand what I feel, only Russians can really sympathise with each other. It is terrible to love your country, and know all the while that it is your bitterest enemy. For the most patriotic of us—the true lovers of freedom and justice, those who would fain see their brethren free and happy—are regarded as traitors by their own people. In Russia, the philanthropist, the patriot stand alone, and the victims they would rescue are the first to nail them to the cross." With a look of horror, she added: "I am young; but I have seen fearful things. When you often wonder why I am so old for my years, you cannot happily picture the scenes I have gone through. I do not forget them. These quiet, peaceful days with

you are as the sweet visions that beguile the delirium of shipwrecked men ; I seem to live at ease in a happy place ; in reality, sorrow and suffering have made me desperate. And undeserved shame!—that is the worst of all. To see those you love and honour, branded as criminals, and to know that in the eye of the world, perhaps in history, their names will be handed down as infamous ! Oh ! to have a voice of inspiration, a voice to proclaim the truth that all would listen to. What can I do—alone, and a woman ?”

“Let us be calm now, my dear. I would not have spoken on any account, had I foreseen how it would agitate you,” he said, soothingly.

“I am glad you did speak. I often wanted to tell you all this,” she replied, rising and drying her tears. “You will better understand my way of looking at things. My lot is bound up with that of the victims I speak of. In their horrible prisons they are dead to us, but we who are free, are bound to live for them, and help them if we can.”

“Ah, I divine what you are driving at. You intend to go to Siberia, but you would never see Europe again,” Sir Vernon put in sadly. “Well, I cannot hinder you, and in a few years I shall be past grieving about anything. Suppose we have a stroll on the terrace, and look at the roses ?”

CHAPTER XXII.**BRIDE AND BRIDEGROOM.**

FOR a few days Mrs. Francis Winn breathed, if not the air of Eden, at least of self-delusion. Winn found it possible to act a part in these first hours of his new life. It was not likely that dangerous topics would be broached by either husband or wife during the honeymoon, and their very surroundings enforced reticence and amiable behaviour; much as a bride and bridegroom court privacy, from the moment they quit the church door till that on which they return home, Argus-eyed criticism is upon them.

Table-d'hôte life in pleasant foreign cities at this stage makes mutual concession easy. It would not only be a violation of tradition, but an abuse of hospitality, for a newly-wedded pair to appear morose or dissatisfied on their bridal tour. Certain conventional routes seem to be made for them, certain hotels built solely for their accommodation, show places and sights to be there in order to relieve the tedium of this initial period. Under the circumstances, Winn and his new-made wife behaved precisely as others similarly placed. They inspected ancient churches and museums, took drives, made excursions,

chatted with sufficient liveliness on tourist topics, and seemed becomingly interested in each other.

Winn looked occasionally weary and apathetic; he attributed such fits of lassitude to the dust and glare of Bruges and Ghent.

"These quaint old Flemish cities," he laughed. "What a delusion they are—brand-new boulevards and squares, blindingly dusty, builders everywhere, and such signs of antiquity as remain to be ferreted out as rats discover the mouldy corners of a cheese! I dare say the Rhine will look like the Rhine, and the cool breezes will rid me of my headache."

But before they got within sight of the Rhine the scales had fallen from Mrs. Harpfield's eyes.

She had married in the full belief that wedlock was to do all that friendship, intercourse, and lavish generousities on her part had failed to accomplish. Winn had not begun by loving her, she knew that well enough.

The magic of the wedding ring was to bring together two natures, diametrically opposed, separated by divergence of years, distanced by education, inherited tastes, and mode of bringing up. Poor woman! How was she to know till experience should teach her, that where such a gulf exists, marriage, far from filling, only widens the breach! Not that Winn openly showed impatience

at his new relation, he pitied her, he pitied himself too much to behave morosely. This marriage, and the way in which it had been brought about, humiliated, but as yet had not exasperated him. For the present he coldly resigned himself to a condition of things altogether odious, hoping that she, too, as time wore on, would learn to bear tacitly this self-imposed burden. There was, however, this difference between the two. She loved him.

A darling delusion is not to be cast off easily as an ill-fitting garment. We cling to the hope we would fain believe in till, all too rudely, stern conviction tears away the veil.

Signs had already been accorded, the note of warning struck. The tenderness without spontaneity, the endearing word that comes as an after-thought, the kind tone that seems like a piece of acting, how heart-breaking, how bitter are these to a passionately loving woman? A first suspicion of the truth filled her mind with a feeling akin to horror. Was it possible that far from loving her, his affection even was lukewarm, his very interest in her feeble? She tried to shut her eyes to the hideous truth. It could not, could not be! Winn's indifference she set down to the ennui of holiday-making over much. His coldness she imputed to pre-occupation; he was thinking of work left undone at home. She recalled a dozen little

circumstances, mere bagatelles, with which to prop up the crazy edifice of hope. One day he had presented her with a bouquet; upon another occasion he had remembered her love of a certain foreign sweetmeat; once, that was in the first blush of their new life, he had whispered in her ear, "My own," and the "Marian" of courtship—"Mary Ann" was too vulgar to be thought of for a moment—had given place to Mr. Greenbank's "Polly."

Thus she was fain to console herself, and, with admirable tact, refrained from comment on his changed mood. Instead, she laid herself out to please, affecting unusual gaiety, putting on her most attractive gowns, hinting at all kinds of future generosity of which he was to be the recipient, and all this time, her heart was gnawed at, eaten away with jealousy and apprehension.

A first rainy morning is often as true a touchstone of temper as real calamity, and Winn woke up one morning to the dreary fact that a great portion of the day would have to be spent indoors. The hotel certainly possessed a reading-room; and a richly-stored museum, offering an agreeable lounge, was a few hundred yards off. But their journey could not be continued, and the obligation of remaining stationary was wholly distasteful. Hitherto they had hurried from place to place, and the bustle of perpetual

arrival and departure had warded off many a fit of ill-temper, boredom and, perhaps, painful explanation. The weather, however, makes no difference whatever to a woman in love, and as Mrs. Harpfield dressed herself with unusual care, her mind was busy with planning all kinds of little distractions, remedies against ennui and the rain. She would talk of property, surely a delightful theme to unromantic, impecunious bridegrooms; would delicately propose the sum to be appropriated to him yearly for his own sole use; as to his debts, they had been made a clean sweep of before the wedding day. She would finally go on to investments, and pay the grateful compliment of asking his advice.

Putting on a really beautiful morning-gown—one of those charming combinations of white cashmere with coloured silk embroidery, that make of a lady presiding at the tea-urn a picture—she opened the door of the next room, a pretty boudoir in which morning tea was served.

“Dear,” she said, approaching him from behind, and dropping a kiss on his chestnut curls, “suppose, as we cannot go out in this downpour, we have a little talk about money?”

He turned round abruptly, no smile of welcome, no brightening look at her appearance; instead she encountered a dark, inquisitorial glance that struck terror, and, at the same time, aroused defiance.

"Could you not wait till we get back?" was the question, not harshly, but rather reproachfully put, much as if she could not of any possibility have hit upon a more hateful topic. She crimsoned and stood still. The tone of his voice, above all, the expression of his face, betokened a very Gehenna yawning at her feet. The terrible truth flashed upon her mind at last, that in this man, in her husband, she now found both accuser and judge.

She maintained her self-possession, however, though a deadly whiteness succeeded to the flush of the minute before.

"Though," he added, in the same key of intense bitterness, "the sooner we get over the disagreeable explanation the better."

"Say anything you have to say," she said, coolly, dropping into an easy-chair.

"Then as it will take time, do oblige me by taking off that fine gown," he said. "Am I to be reminded every hour, almost every moment, that we are living under false pretences, and that the proper place for both of us is a cell in Pentonville Prison?"

He looked up as if really expecting that she would obey his request, but she never moved.

"You know what Philip's income is, and I am the legally constituted disposer of it. Am I to deny myself necessities in order to accumulate wealth for an imbecile?" she asked.

"Necessaries, necessities!" he retorted, with a mocking laugh. "And I suppose handkerchiefs bordered with old point-lace are necessities, and champagne suppers given to that unmitigated old scoundrel, Greenbank, and all the rest of it. Unpleasant as it is to both of us, it is much better to go to the bottom of things at once, without a moment's delay. So without mincing matters, I tell you once and for all, my dear Marian, that this sort of thing cannot go on, that is to say if you wish to lead an endurable life with me."

"What has made you so over nice on a sudden?"

"We shall come to that presently. What I want you to understand clearly is this. I cannot, as your husband, countenance such a system of spoliation. I owe you money, I mean, I owe poor little Philip money, but I intend to repay him, every penny one day, and, meantime, no more wastefulness or display—do you comprehend me? As the joint steward of the boy's fortune, I forbid any further misappropriation. We will live simply and honestly, and put Philip in his proper place."

"You have not the fraction of a right to interfere where he is concerned. The wording of his father's will may perhaps convince you of that."

"Oh! if you have recourse to wills and lawyers, we must fight out the battle on

other ground," Winn replied, cool and determined as herself. "Why not be reasonable? Believe, at least, this of me, I wish you well. I want to live with you peaceably, avoiding, especially for your own sake, anything like a scandal. We might just as well be friends. But there are many things—you seem to forget it—that serve a woman in far better stead than fine clothes, show and parade. Goodness of heart, integrity, kindness, don't you suppose a man may be won by these as much as by velvet gowns and choice little dinners? The worst of us have some feeble pretensions to a conscience."

"You should have warned me beforehand that you were going to marry me for my soul's good, as the pious folks put it," was the taunting answer. "And surely ask yourself the question: Are you the sort of person to undertake such a mission?"

"I have faults of my own, God forgive me," he said, sincere in every particular, too wretched, too conscience-stricken to pick and choose phrases. "But getting into debt is not downright robbery. Indebtedness is a legal compact, the creditor is a voluntary agent and can enforce payment. Misappropriation of trust money is a different matter. To tell you the real, honest truth, I married you without any set purpose of such kind. When I thought about it at all, I determined, disapproving of your conduct as I did all the

time, to let you go your own way and to go mine."

He crimsoned as he recalled the same confession made to Nadine. Yes, it was but too true! He had married Philip Summerhill's dishonest trustee, without any intention of deliberately thwarting her designs. He had made the desperate, the terrible resolve to resign himself to her malversations.

"I did not realise—how could I then?—that such a compromise was impossible; I mean to a man possessed of a particle of rightmindedness or honest principle. I don't wish to be hard upon you, Polly, I am the last person in the world fit to judge another, but you must see, you cannot help seeing that the self-appropriation of that poor child's fortune is nothing more nor less than a piece of villany, and in sharing such spoils I feel myself a villain."

She was silent, evidently determined to hear him out.

"This wedding trip, whose pocket does it come out of but Philip's? There is another matter more serious still. He is about as incapable as you or I. He ought to be sent to school, and have the advantages of other boys in his position. It is inhuman, it is monstrous to stunt his mental growth and drive him into semi-idiotcy, for your own ends."

"Have you anything more to say?" she asked.

"Yes, one thing more," he replied, his

voice fraught with real feeling. He was now no longer trying to reach her conscience, but to touch her heart. "We have taken a step that could not possibly bring about a mutual happiness, this much you must have divined from the first, but let us make the best of it now. You shall never have cause to reproach me, I promise you that, if you consent to give up this foul game. Let us then live upon my own earnings, and the income that is your due, let Philip be treated as the young heir of a handsome property, let the train of thieves and hangers-on go, have honest souls about you—then, and not before, can we live together as husband and wife should."

It was odd, and Winn owned the inconsistency to himself, that in making this appeal he had involuntarily carried out Nadine's instructions to the letter. What he had declared impossible was done, and on the impulse of the moment. The manly outspokenness, the fervent entreaty, the passionate remonstrance were all spontaneous. Not Nadine's image had been present, not her inspirations had prompted, only the whisperings of sternly aroused conscience, and the upheld finger of retributive destiny pointing—Beware!

When he had finished speaking, Mrs. Winn rose with trembling limbs and brows angrily knit. She was determined not to let him see that in reality he was her dominator.

That foolish, passionate clinging to him, that longing for a fond word or caressing smile, should be crushed out of her heart if the effort cost life itself.

"We will not talk of these things any more," she said, speaking spasmodically, as if every word were choking her. "It can do no good. I did not know before that generosity shown to your sex entails not gratitude, much less affection, only contempt. Thank you for the lesson."

She put her hand to the door, and added each syllable gasped out as if life was ebbing with it, her bosom heaving with the effort:

"Henceforth then we will, if you please, be as strangers to each other—except in the eye, of the world—we can hardly sue for a divorce on the ground of disagreeing about dress and dinners. Act the part that seems good to you. Where Philip is concerned you are sure to be worsted. I have the law on my side."

The door closed upon her before he could proffer a word, if, indeed, he had anything further to say. She re-entered her bedroom, and sat down to think. What a curse seemed that refreshing summer downpour! Had the weather been fine, she could have sought some sequestered nook in the park, there unobserved to weep out her wrath and mortification—sorrow she would not as yet own to.

In a crowded hotel, with walls made, as it would seem, rather to let in than keep out

sound, no corner offered safe retreat from espionage and observation. Her room, too, led out of his room; he might surprise her sobbing—as he would fondly believe—for the sake of a lost love! As she sat by the window, hollow-eyed, white-cheeked, and desperate, her eyes rested upon a noble old church close by. Yes, there was the solitude she wanted; in these dark, deserted churches a woman might seek the unfailing woman's remedy, and weep without the torture of a compassionating eye.

She cast off her elegant morning-gown with vindictive fingers; in her despair and blind, unreasoning wrath, it almost seemed the cause of the painful scene just gone through. Putting on a neat travelling dress and sober coloured cloak, she crept out of the room and into the street. The rain was torrential, and hardly a creature stirred; wading along, for the water flowed like a very river on pavement and carriage-way, she hastened towards the church, drenched in the five minutes' walk from head to foot. As she passed down the aisle, her dripping garments left a watery track behind, but no one was there to heed; the vast, dimly-lighted interior seemed quite deserted. Finding herself, as she imagined, alone, she took a chair behind a column, and, leaning on a prie-dieu, wept long and bitterly; how long those hot, uncomfortable tears had fallen she could not tell, but she

was suddenly alarmed by a light hand on her shoulder.

Looking up she saw a fair and gentle woman wearing widow's weeds standing beside her, her eyes full of pity and sympathetic longing to console, her expression that of one who had also wrestled with soul-crushing grief.

"My sister in sorrow," she whispered in English, with a strong foreign accent, "what consolation you need is at hand," and as she spoke, she pointed to a confessional close by, she had herself just quitted.

"Do not hesitate," she added; "the ministrations of the Church are open to all. Enter and unbosom yourself, whether of grief or conscious wrong-doing; you will leave your burden behind you."

But Mrs. Harpfield only lifted her head for a moment to reply in a ruffled undertone:

"I am a Protestant."

It was in her mind to add, "and an unbeliever," but she refrained; she only wanted the well-intentioned intruder to be gone.

The stranger lingered yet another moment, and, bending down carelessly, touched the other's clasped tear-wet hands, murmuring: "I will pray for you."

She left the church, and meantime a peasant woman with a basket of marketing in her hand, entered the confessional. Mrs. Harpfield could hear the whisperings of priest and penitent; the incident, and the words

just whispered in her ear, set her on a new track of thought. "You will leave your burden behind you." Was it indeed so? Could human beings, living in the world like herself, find consolation and relief here? Could a minister of religion stem the tide of evil that threatened to engulf her life? By little and little she thought she could see a way, which was, doubtless, the priest's way.

Winn had offered compromise, he had even held out the prospect of a perfect reconciliation upon one condition, the surrender of Philip's fortune. She was bidden to humiliate herself to dust, to acknowledge that years of her past life had been a subterfuge and a lie, to enter upon an existence of abject self-sacrifice and insignificance, for the sake of what? His good opinion.

But would love go with it? Could she only assure herself of this! She glanced towards the confessional as the second penitent went out, and a short, sharp, mental conflict took place. The remedy suggested by her unknown counsellor seemed now easy and straightforward enough. She had but to take the place of that peasant woman, confess her past wrong-doing, accept priestly admonition, then return to the hotel, tell Winn the whole truth, and promise all and more than he asked. He would be grateful, thankful, kind, and, of course, in

a covert, self-restrained way, triumphant. Would he ever love her as she had once dreamed of being loved? Could that black-robed Belgian priest but promise her Winn's love, Protestant, unbeliever, although she was, she would have sought his aid now.

But he could not—no one could—she felt almost ready to shriek out in her despair. Winn had never loved her, he had repaid benefits by reproach, generosity by upbraiding. Neither the entreaties of others, nor the stings of conscience, nothing, should induce her to go on her knees to her husband.

"I have been looking for you everywhere," he said, as two hours later she returned to the hotel.

She was quite calm now, and all traces of weeping were gone. The conflict was over. She would struggle for mastery to the end.

"What were umbrellas and waterproofs made for?" she asked, in a jesting, light, cheerful tone. "I like to have my full share of sight-seeing, wet or fine."

And when next day the pair went away, the table d'hôte comments passed upon them were as follows: "Very agreeable people that Mr. and Mrs. Winn—newly married, I should say, and not foolishly over head and ears in love, just agreeably so, for outsiders."

"The lady has decidedly the advantage of seniority, and, as is often in such cases, decision of character, I should say. But any

woman of fortune, as I take her to be, might fall in love with an agreeable, handsome fellow like that."

"And how much better it is in marriage that good things should be impartially divided," remarked a third observer of men and manners. "Not all the good looks and youthful graces matched here, not heiresses wedded to heirs there; but a clever, bright girl, making up for the deficiencies of a dull partner. *Æsop* wedded to *Miranda*—well, if such extremes meet too widely, say, at least, beauty wedded to plainness, wealth to poverty, wit and spirit to humdrum common-sense—these are the kind of marriages to make things even in the world, and prevent humanity from being divided into castes."

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. DON'S SUCCESS IN SOCIETY.

Is not the immortal *Weller* already a survival, *Jeames*, the diarist, already relegated to the category of lost types? A hundred years hence dinner-table tattle below stairs may be as brilliant as at a club dinner of wits; elocution in the kitchen, more fastidious than in the dining-room; a finished epistolary style perhaps easiest to find in the love-letters of

chefs and Abigails. Criticism, then, will no longer be wasted upon the doings of my lord and my lady above stairs, but occupy itself with subtle disquisitions on politics, literature, and the fine arts. Intellectual gymnastics will go hand in hand with social progress, one monopoly after another be wrenched from the upper ten thousand, and the servants' hall become a centre of sweetness and light. Can any one in his senses doubt it? Let him play eavesdropper to-day when his salaried household sups; instead of tittle-tattle and gossip, he will hear politics discussed solemnly, as if each speaker had a seat in the House; or if the company happen to be in more playful vein, the latest follies, of society and the world, evoke pleasing satire. No matter the question brought forward, each has his say, from the scullion to the house-steward, the quality of the conversation very likely equaling that of the fare, which is saying a good deal.

Soon—who can doubt it?—novels will no longer be written for the kitchen, but in the kitchen, a new, easy, engaging literature will spring up. From the still-room shall emanate strains impassioned as those of Sappho, whilst some Soyer shall immortalise himself, not by a cookery-book, but by a new system of ethics or philosophy.

A brilliant or amusing talker at a foreign table d'hôte is a greater attraction than local

dainties or world-famed wines. For what do nineteen-twentieths of mortal born travel? Why do we all so madly quit our homes, incurring sea-sickness, fatigue, expense, and ill-temper? Not because our stomachs rebel against roast beef, and clamour for truffles bisque, not because ale has become unpalatable to us and we thirst for claret, as seafaring men crave lemons. The real reason why we expatriate ourselves is because we want to hear fresh voices. The conversation of our friends and familiars, no matter how beloved, has become wearisome. The insipidities of strangers are more bearable than the truisms, or even sparkle, of those we have known all our lives.

"You appear to have travelled a good deal, sir," said a burly country doctor, an authority equal to the Pope in his own little Canton, at this Continental ordinary retiring, even to shyness. "You appear, indeed, to have been everywhere and seen everything."

The guest thus complimented was a well-dressed, portly man of middle age, and engaging manners, above all things gifted with flowing speech.

"You flatter me, doctor," he laughed, for his interlocutor's calling was evident; "but if I have, as without vanity I may lay claim to more general knowledge than some shall, I tell you how it has been acquired?"

Dessert was now placed on the table;

appetite being stayed, all listened, with eyes turned towards the speaker.

The assemblage was a tolerably representative one. There was the usual sprinkling of clergymen, with their dames in the neatest caps, and home-educated, un-flirtatious daughters; one or two retired business men, anxious to see and hear all they could; the usual contingent of highly-cultured, middle-aged ladies, able to sketch, talk French, and enjoy architecture; a company of undergraduates on a cycling tour, apt to swagger and make much of themselves; a Transatlantic group or two, of the type familiar to all; young girls beautiful as angels, with voices unmusical as mackaws; their fathers and mothers meekly submitting to filial authority; these made up the party.

"You were kind enough to say just now, doctor," resumed the speaker, "that I seem to have been everywhere, and to have seen everything. Why am I a better instructed smatterer than my neighbours? The answer is short: Because I never, by any chance whatever, waste my time on a book."

"God bless me!" ejaculated the doctor.

"In the States, I guess we read ourselves stupid," screamed a piquant damsel from Chicago.

"I admit," put in a grave country parson, in matters intellectual somewhat behind his epoch, "I admit that six months of prison

with no other mental pabulum than the Bible, might do any one of us a world of good."

"Surely no rule was ever without an exception. You occasionally open the pages of Mr. Ruskin?" asked an æsthetic lady-sketcher, sitting next the oracle.

"Lives the human being who can exist without Mark Twain?" cried an irreverent Cantab.

"I make over to you all the books in the Vatican Library, or buried under the sand of Alexandria," added a second, "only don't confiscate my beloved Ingoldsby Legends."

The oracle glanced to the right and the left, and smilingly shook his head.

"No letting in the thin edge of the wedge. I am serious, I am indeed. Reading is like dram-drinking: a man must abstain altogether, or remain a confirmed tippler. I prefer to keep my head clear and my wits alive. For what are books? Manna sent from heaven? Inspiration of a second John of Patmos? Not at all, only so much consumption of pens, ink, and paper by mere mortals like myself—men, women, and fools."

"There are books and books," said one of the parsons. "Do you mean to say that for the sake of saving yourself a little trouble you will leave the chaff unsifted, let the golden grain be lost?"

"The argument, we want the argument,"

insisted the country doctor, thinking what a good story this would be to repeat to his valetudinarians.

"Yes, the argument," echoed another.

"To be able to discriminate would necessitate the reading of all," pursued the speaker.

"Even to be able to criticise the dish we have just degustated, that excellent pasty, how many must we have eaten before our opinion about it is worth a farthing? We must, indeed, know not only what is the tip-top of the pastry, the sauce, the meats, and, above all, the art of putting all together. Now if it is a matter of immense difficulty thus to decide upon the merits of a pie, how much more weighty is the summing-up of a book?"

"True, true; yet——" put in the first-named parson.

"The argument, the argument!" cried the rest.

"Impartial ignorance," resumed the speaker, "is a thousand times less dangerous in cookery than in book-learning. And another point: We have all heard what the blind say of scenery. Talk to the non-seeing of lakes, mountains, and rivers. They imagine sights far more splendid than those their luckier fellows gape at with eyes wide open. So it is with books. I have never read a line of either Milton or Shakespeare, not I! But I hear others go mad about them, and I dare say I

imagine the old fogeys to have written much finer works than they really did. In books as in company, habit vulgarises, familiarity engenders contempt. I respect all from the simple fact that I have hob-nobbed with none."

"There is something in that," incautiously observed the doctor, to be immediately reproved by his neighbours.

"The argument, the argument!"

"You will ask me, perhaps, how I can tell the time of day if I never look at the clock," the oracle continued; "how, if I never open a book, I know what has gone on, and what is still going on in the world. Before clocks were ever thought of, did folks go to bed at noon and get up at midnight, think you? Did not their stomachs tell them when the dinner-hour had come round? Take what is called history. Am I a jot the wiser for learning that Harry the Eighth—may he still be in purgatory for his sins!—had six wives, and cut off the heads of those he grew tired of? Then books written about what every man, woman, and child with brains in their head can judge for themselves, animals, plants, stones, and so forth. Can I not learn from observation whether one four-legged creature is made to run in harness, and another to give milk, whether one herb seasons the pot and another sends a man with sharp pains to bed? As to poetry, well, let

any moonstruck dolt jingle rhymes to please himself, say I.

The rose was just washed with the shower,
Which Mary to Anna conveyed. . . .

OR—

And Hugo is gone to his lonely bed,
To covet there another's bride. . . .

Now what is there to do a man good in such verses as these? No, have your own thoughts upon everything, is my advice to my fellow-men. Don't put on other people's opinions which no more fit you than their top-coats and pantaloons—excuse the comparison, ladies—but for all that, there are scores, nay, thousands of books I would read if I could only get at them.”

“You don't say so?” asked the doctor.

“No, really; what are they?” interrogated one of the parsons, bringing out a note-book. The information might come in handy for a sermon.

“Ay, give me a book written by an inhabitant of the planet Jupiter, or by a dweller in Mars, telling me what kind of life folks live up there. Let me pick up, sticking to an aerolite, a bit of newspaper published in that bright little planet Mercury, a scrap of the advertisement sheet of its *Times*, or, better still, *Punch*. Wouldn't I don my spectacles and pore over those! Who knows? We shall not see the time, but our great-great-

great-grandchildren may, when such curiosity will be gratified, and balloons full of books men are tired to death of here, may be exchanged for the masterpieces written perhaps by beings without hands, feet, or skulls, or perhaps a double supply of both."

"Who is that most agreeable man, one of the most amusing talkers certainly I ever met with?" asked one table-guest of another when the volley of applause had subsided.

"His name is Don, and he is engaged to be married to that pretty, sentimental, middle-aged lady sitting next to him—Lady Diana Leigh, eighth daughter of the late Lord Melford—the second match made up in this hotel within the last fortnight," was the reply. "I really think I shall bring my daughters here. Poor girls, they have so few opportunities at home."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CITY OF FAREWELLS.

WHAT a change from the green, sunny, park-like country between London and Liverpool, and the sombre yet grandiose city itself! Dusky leviathan casting its grim shadow across as fair a river as England can show.

City of cruelest partings, valedictions none the less heart-breaking or pathetic because they are made silently, borne with other trials of the wretched in unquestioning, uncomplaining acquiescence. Whence comes this wondrous patience of the poorest? It is one of those mysteries that remain unfathomable. Dark, massive buildings; a perpetual bustle of omnibuses and tramcars; motley crowds at every corner; tattered, barefoot boys and girls, selling flowers, matches, and half-penny newspapers, made a sight new to Suffolk eyes, in some respects new to all but Liverpool eyes. Where do they come from? What rank soil grows these weeds of humanity, here unnoticed, apparently uncared for? London poverty by the side of this fades into insignificance; the youthful flower-sellers and newsvendors of Cheapside and Trafalgar Square, are outwardly little ladies and gentlemen, by comparison with the grimy, half-naked gipsies of the capital of the Mersey. In the midst of the new and bewildering scene, a bit of gorgeous pantomime lights up the prevailing murkiness. What can it be—this gaily caparisoned carriage, with its four mettlesome prancers and lacqueys in glittering livery, cocked hats, white coats, long lapped white silk stockings, their gold embroidery flashing, a fairy equipage like that of Cinderella when transformed from dust-maiden into a princess?

"Does the Queen sometimes live here?" asked Philip, agape.

"It is only the Mayor of Liverpool," replied Mr. O'Meara, with an air of superiority.

We grow accustomed to splendour, and not a tatterdemalion little match-seller so much as budged an inch in order to gape at the Mayor's carriage.

The little "Temperance Hotel" to which Mr. O'Meara conducted his friends, like many other things, was not to be judged by appearances. Dingy without, and shabby within, it nevertheless soon vindicated its true character in the eyes of these new clients. The cheery Irish waitress made friends with Fanny, and Philip was delighted when quite a home-like countrified tea was spread in the little parlour; hot toast, cakes, jam, it was as good as a picnic to Harwich. Everything pleased him: the original water-colours on the walls, productions of some boarding-school prodigy, the odd volumes for Sunday reading, the old-fashioned piano, the *épergne* in electro-plate filled with paper flowers.

Next day, after delightful rest, how cheery, too, seemed that little coffee-room, windows flung wide open, sunshine flooding the place, the table spread for breakfast, and before them a bustling scene—Cheapside out—Cheapsided!

Mr. O'Meara looked in early with the best news. As good luck would have it, two

second-class places had become vacant at the last moment in his own ship. A lady and gentleman were prevented from sailing by illness. Fanny and Philip could therefore start with him on the morrow. Meantime, after securing their berths, they must see something of the town.

The trio set forth in high spirits, the ship-steward very proud of his task. Fanny, wearing a white dress dotted with pink spots, pink sash, and white straw hat trimmed with rosebuds, seemed to him the most captivating vision of womanhood he had gazed upon for many a day. When they reached a crossing, and he put her little hand within his arm, he glanced hither and thither, hoping that some acquaintance might be there to see.

Very proud, too, seemed Mr. O'Meara of his city, so he regarded it, naming each big black building in turn, as if these gloomy piles, towering under a leaden sky, were the most beautiful edified by human hands. The sun may shine in Liverpool, the balmiest breezes blow, the showers of April fall, these blessed agencies cannot here work their usual magic, and cleanse or brighten the murky atmosphere.

"That is the Pro-cathedral," said the guide, pointing to a large unbeautiful church. "My friends, I mean coloured men, are always married there. Several I know have married white wives—as I mean to do."

Whereupon Fanny flushed and hung down her head.

At the end of the long, dull Hanover Street, they came within sight of the Sailors' Home.

"There's a place for you, look at it; you might suppose it was a grand club-house," cried Mr. O'Meara, admiringly; "but the outside is nothing. Just wait and see."

About the handsome entrance lounged a dozen idlers, seafaring men of various nationalities, their complexions varying from blond to jet-black.

"That's a friend of mine," continued O'Meara, going up to a somewhat lazy-looking African smoking a long white pipe in the sun. "How d'ye do, Henry? I am showing Liverpool to this young lady and gentleman."

Henry nodded without removing his pipe. He was a middle-aged, not ill-looking man, with broken teeth and a close-cut moustache, good-natured as Mr. Walter O'Meara himself, but quite without his alacrity and buoyant spirits.

"Are you a steward, too, sir?" asked Philip.

"I'm a stoker," was the reply, the pipe still in the speaker's mouth.

"Do you like that business?"

"Ahem, I have to put up with it," answered Henry, smiling ironically.

"Are you married?"

"No; a wife, you see, costs something to keep. I'm waiting for a job just now." And somehow Philip felt that Henry's lot was less happy than that of his fellow-countryman.

"Have you any relations in Africa?" asked the lad.

"A sister, that is all."

The speaker puffed away as if the recollections of home and kinsfolk were not particularly exhilarating.

"You should marry," put in Fanny, feeling sorry for O'Meara's friend.

"If I could find a wife!" laughed the stoker, bitterly. Then the three went indoors.

The place was palatially spacious and handsome; in a large ante-room blazed a huge fire, although the summer was at its height, and round it was a little group of sailors warming themselves.

"You see, many come here from the tropics, and are always shivering, be the season what it may," explained the cicerone. With natural pride he showed them the billiard and reading-rooms, clothes' store, refreshment stalls, finally his own neat, cheerful little bedroom on the fifth storey.

"Each man has a room to himself. We are treated like gentlemen, the best of everything for sixteen shillings a week. But would you believe it?—scores won't come here, the place is too good for them. They prefer low holes and bad company, and they don't like

being asked to lay by. We'll look at the Savings Bank downstairs. I've a trifle to put in myself."

They waited at the general office whilst the elderly clerk changed two bank-notes for a young sailor.

"There's the Savings Bank, just opposite to you. Had you not better leave some of your money there before it is all gone?" asked the clerk.

The young man stammered incoherent excuses, gathered up his gold, and hurried off.

"That's the way of most of them," the steward said; "twenty pounds, forty pounds here to-day, gone to-morrow. But that isn't my way," and out he pulled his bank-book, and a tiny bag of sovereigns, delighted at the compliments paid him in Fanny's hearing.

That piece of business transacted, and the berths secured, the three amused themselves for the rest of the day.

When was love-making hindered by the presence of a third person? The new-comers must, of course, see the Mersey Tunnel, and the excursion gave Fanny those little frights and flutterings of the heart so propitious to the manly wooer. When the huge lift began very slowly to descend, and she learned that they were going to the depth of a thousand feet in the bowels of the earth, she clutched a hand of Philip's, and, of course, Mr. O'Meara clutched

hers. Then, when landed on the subterranean platform, a few feet of rock, as a roof, only dividing them from the river, she suddenly became faint and giddy. A drop of moisture fell on her forehead, she declared that the waves were breaking in. Mr. O'Meara despatched Philip to the refreshment stall for a teaspoonful of brandy, and, meantime, Fanny's pretty head rested on his shoulder.

"How kind you are! What a silly little thing I am!" she cried, as in the semi-darkness he ventured to kiss her hand.

"Just the silly little thing men would go through fire for," he whispered, and in a sense he was right. Mr. O'Meara would fain have spent a whole day, a whole week, in the Mersey Tunnel. The eerie chill and midnight darkness of the place were more delicious to him than the gardens of the Crystal Palace in June. They spent only ten minutes there, but to excellent purpose. Philip had to take the empty wine-glass back, and get change for a sovereign—Mr. O'Meara had all kinds of small coin with him, but he seized on any pretext for delay. By the time the messenger came back, a passionate declaration of love had been poured into Fanny's ear. "Yes, you must, my lovely one; if you throw it in the sea to-morrow, you must wear it to-day for my sake," and a betrothal ring of pure gold, with "Mizpah" engraved on it, was slipped on the third finger of her left hand.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE LANDING-STAGE.

As the new-comers neared the docks and the famous landing-stage, they began to realise that the city itself is one vast landing-stage between what may be regarded as two distinct planets, the old world and the new.

A hubbub of foreign speech reaches the ears, the surging crowd about the quays is composed of multifarious types and races; only the perpetually flowing stream of the ordinary, uninteresting well-to-do, recalls the fact that we are at home, in so-called happy England!

The splendid promenade, miles long, reached, a heart-stirring picture of the noble river is gained, its low-lying banks sunny and green, its surface bright as the bright sky above, the vast expanse of water almost deserted. The tide is out, and till it begins to turn, none of the ships waiting beyond the bar can make for harbour. Close to the docks lie countless pilot-boats and tenders, the last-named used for carrying passengers to the huge ships lying at anchor—floating towns they seem, as indeed they may be called when crew, emigrants, and passengers, hundreds, nay, thousands of souls, are housed.

A majestic prospect is here, perhaps none

in the world more so—the wide river, the long, almost interminable line of docks, the shipping, the stir and bustle of international life. It is still early, yet the landing-stage is thronged; here and there a group of hangers-on, seafaring men from all parts of the world waiting for a job, curious idlers, busy officials, ladies and gentlemen bent on an airing, and an ever-increasing, ever-swelling host of emigrants, a veritable army, here squatting in parties on the ground, there straying hither and thither, forlorn and helpless as sheep waiting to be penned. So outlandish and uncouth the aspect of these multitudes, one might almost fancy them denizens of another planet, their clothes being cut after wholly unfamiliar pattern, their speech unintelligible even to polyglot travellers, their faces wild, wondering, simple.

Two ships were to start for New York that afternoon, the one within half an hour of the other. By ten o'clock, the first tender was packed with emigrants—eight hundred and odd souls, with bag and baggage, sole worldly possessions of the population of a town! As the densely piled little craft moved slowly out of port, looking as if it must sink to the bottom from over-weight, a faint cheer was raised from those left behind, faintly responded to by their friends aboard. There was little of hopefulness, much less of exhilaration, in the two crews, both bound for the same destination, both to remain within hail of each other, on

the voyage. Except among the younger girls, no smiles were seen, no laughter heard. These future colonists of the new world, set out for their unknown homes rather as dreary exiles than alert volunteers, with stolid resignation, not buoyant looking forward.

The young men have a look of pensiveness, almost of humiliation, appearing to reproach themselves because the old world has no room for them. Pathetic, too, the expression of their elders—gray-haired matrons, bent grandsires, who brood and ponder on a past now buried, for ever lost to sight, as lost kith and kin in the tomb.

Seated in the second tender, their guide and companion busy on the ship, Fanny and Philip watched the unimaginable scene.

The Norse folk interested them most—the women with bright-coloured handkerchiefs knotted round their heads, coarse, home-knitted woollen jackets on their shoulders, many, as well as husbands and brothers, wearing leather boots reaching to the knee; the babies, ungartered, just wrapped in bits of cotton stuff; each little group carrying new tin drinking and washing vessels. Despite the absence of rags—for all had evidently been tidied for the occasion—the spectacle moved much more than the cruelest poverty to which English eyes are hardened. No element of shameless vagrancy, no trace of brazen pauperism marred the gazer's pity. These poor people, with

their honest faces, tractable ways, and gentle speech, were as innocent of their forlornness as a callow brood orphaned for the sportsman's pleasure.

"Are the children's toys packed up?" asked Philip of Fanny.

The toyless children made the heart ache. Here they waited for hours—babies in arms who had never beheld a rattle; little women, who had never mothered a wooden doll; little men, strangers to tops and whistles. Bantlings—boys and girls—sat stock still and stared about them, not one possessed of a plaything.

"Poor things, they haven't got any. I wish we had brought a few penny ones with us," Fanny replied, her careless nature touched with real compassion. Something else soon set her wondering still more.

Here were scores of youths and maidens—stalwart, well-favoured fellows; fair-haired, comely girls; but, in the world from which they had dropped, flirting must be wholly unknown, Fanny thought. Not a covert whisper, not a furtive glance, much less a stolen hand-clasp! The company was as circumspect and demure as the Christians in Pilgrim's Progress.

"Were marrying and giving in marriage otherwise ordered in those far-off countries from which they had come?" the simple girl wondered—"young people paired off by Act

of Parliament, without any Sunday walks, love-letters, kisses, and valentines?" She felt glad that she belonged to a place where things were better arranged.

Mr. O'Meara welcomed them on board in the spick-and-span uniform he had described. Through the chaos of the lower deck he first guided them, showing everything—the berths, narrow as coffins; the roaring fires of the kitchen—how ships escape being burnt to ashes must ever remain a mystery to the uninitiated—the dark refectory. Next they surveyed the second-class accommodation, lastly that of the saloon—a survey, with full allowances for advanced philanthropy, hygiene, and public spirit, that can but recall Dante's pilgrimage through Inferno and Purgatory to Paradise.

By little and little the confusion in the steerage gave way to order. Somebody's wand was waved to good purpose. When the bell summoned to twelve-o'clock dinner, each passenger had found his berth and his bundles, many had changed their clothes; when, half an hour later, all emerged for the final muster, the general aspect was cheerier.

"The second-class passengers come on board at two, then the doctor who examines us all, and at four o'clock, as the ship steams out of harbour, the first-class. We don't wait for them," said Mr. O'Meara. "By four we are really off."

"Must I be examined?" asked Philip, looking alarmed.

"Oh, we've only to pass before the doctor, ship's crew and passengers, just to show that we are there; that is all. I'll come for you when the time is up," replied the steward, and hurried away.

That waiting for the doctor would have been a sore trial to all before dinner. After a hot, savoury, unstinted meal, perhaps the best many an emigrant had tasted in his life, all felt compliant and alert. A look of cheerfulness, almost hilarity, prevailed as the eight hundred and odd passengers were massed together on the lower deck. There they waited for an hour or more, bareheaded in the meridian sun, most standing, none seeming to dream of hardship.

In the meantime, a second muster was taking place above—stewards, cooks, and seamen in bodies, preparing for the roll-call. And long all had to wait. One might have supposed the doctor to be the Shah of Persia, from the right royal way in which he made nearly a thousand people bide his time. But ships' crews and emigrants are meek. Very differently would the affair be treated were a Government inspector thus to keep waiting the haughty ladies and gentlemen of the saloon. How he would be abused, threatened, heaped with invectives, all but pitched overboard by irate Yankee millionaire or English

squire! At last the medical magnate did indeed vouchsafe to put in an appearance—a big, burly man, puffing away at an enormous cigar, whilst, as swiftly as possible, he got over his task—first the roll-call of the crew, then the so-called inspection of the passengers.

Nothing could be more expeditious than the process. A good deal of chaffing in various tongues now went on, and many seemed to regard the whole thing as a joke; whilst men, women, and children were hurried by. At the sight of a baby, the doctor lunged forward, and, cigar still in mouth, just glanced at the little living bundle, that was all.

Certain symptoms, however, may be detected by a Government doctor, no matter how anxious to lose no time. As the last stragglers were brought up, a helpless-looking family, uncouth in appearance as Esquimaux, filed past—father with a string of toddlers, and mother with infant at her breast.

As before, the little bundle was peered into, when the doctor, with a sudden change of countenance, took the cigar from his mouth and arrested the group; then, as the full light of day flashed on the tiny, doll-like face in the woman's arms, and showed its awful calm and pallor, there arose a cry of anguish that might be heard by those on shore.

The child had died from heart disease aboard. There were five boys and girls of all ages clinging to father's skirts, too awed and timid to wail aloud. They gazed on the dead baby with fixed eyes and trembling lips. The man, his own feelings merged in sympathy for the helpless things around them, uttered little soothing expressions in a strange tongue; whilst his partner rocked herself to and fro, past comfort as any queen whose heir lies dead in her arms.

There ensued a brief confabulation of the authorities, then followed a scene, the pitifulness of which cannot be put into any words. Kindly enough, yet with the utmost possible despatch, the dazed family were made to realise their position. No help remained for it; the interpreter gave them to understand that an inquest would have to be held on the baby, father and children must perforce sail alone, mother to follow by next ship.

The resistlessness of extreme poverty is more pathetic than any outburst of grief. Utterly helpless, almost too desolated to weep, the group stood still, whilst the woman was hurried ashore wailing over her mournful burden. Not a sailor but wept to see this little tragedy, which had completely driven from Philip's mind any anxiety on his own account. The morning had, indeed, been so crowded with impressions, that he felt removed

by a world from his own life already. The last moment had come; they were to sail in an hour. Oh, surely he was safe now!

Just then Mr. O'Meara came up with a grave face. He knew something of his young friend's history, and were Philip hindered from sailing, would not Fanny be hindered too?

"There's a lady inquiring for you," he said; "just crossed in the tender. Business most pressing, she says."

Philip's cheeks crimsoned and his eyes filled with burning tears. His bright dream of freedom was then over! Walter O'Meara could become a free man, his own lot was to remain a slave.

But instead of Mrs. Harpfield's cold, dull, masterful eyes, and sallow, unemotional face, it was a vision of beauty, affectionateness, and joy, that now flashed before him.

"Philip," Nadine cried, throwing her arms around him, "I have come for you. You are mine, mine!"

CHAPTER XXVI

A TERRIBLE INTERVAL

NADINE only stayed on board ten minutes, but that terrible interval Mr. O'Meara would never forget as long as he lived. He dared not intrude upon the three in close confabula-

tion on the upper deck. He was afraid of approaching too near, lest his inquisitiveness should wear the look of impertinence. There he must wait, every second seeming an hour till the hurried conference was over.

Fortunately, he had just then nothing particular to do. Three-quarters of an hour yet wanted to the coming on board of the saloon passengers and the starting of the ship. Were Fanny snatched from him now, he should at least be able to bid her farewell.

During the last few days, the steward's existence had been one continued scene out of fairyland, a long, unbroken series of ecstatic hopes and enjoyments. They had spent a few days in London, and who so elate as he, when Fanny accepted his arm for the promenade, or read out of his hymn-book at the mission service? No former love, not even the Rose that was a rose indeed, seemed so fascinating in his eyes as the Suffolk maiden; her foolish little ways, her diversion at his own, quite intoxicated him.

"You seem to enjoy yourself, Mr. O'Meara," she once said.

"Who should enjoy himself if it is not Walter O'Meara, no other mother's son? I'm not like Henry, he's always downcast; but then, you see, he has not got to the top of the tree. Everything is pure enjoyment to a man who is at the top of the tree. Formerly, I was at everybody's beck and call; my tips

were threepence here, sixpence there, a few coppers for airing one passenger's shirt and mending his socks, half-a-crown for washing and getting up several dozen pieces for a family, and so on. But Lord love you, I get half-sovereigns, whole sovereigns on this line, and for doing next to nothing, making others run. Who wouldn't be in my place, I should like to know?"

Whenever opportunity offered, he would whisper an insinuating word into Fanny's little ear.

"Come now, I give up the sea when I marry, of course. Which shall it be—a temperance hotel or an eating-house?"

"Oh! Mr. O'Meara."

"Oh! Miss Fanny."

And so saying, he mimicked her deprecating gesture to life.

"I've laid by a nice bit of money. You are not going to keep your brother's house in the bush, like Mary. You have not a twin sister you can't be parted from, like Rose. You are not like Jane——"

"Look, Mr. O'Meara; look, Fanny!"—they were at the Zoological Gardens upon this occasion—"Another bit for the big old fellow, the tawny old lion; oh, what jaws!" cried Philip, laughing immoderately, as the portions were seized, and growled over.

"You like me as well as they did?" pursued the swain, when the interruption was over.

"Perhaps," said Fanny.

"Perhaps?" again mimicked her lover, and with so much comicality that certain of the bystanders could not resist a smile.

Thus, in spite of drawbacks, the love-making had gone on. The pair were never alone. Philip's society was a hindrance, but ingeniously got over. Even when the three were sitting together in an omnibus, the lover contrived to make his opportunity. Fanny's mind was wavering, but one argument, that a pretty strong one, pleaded on his behalf. The only man she had ever fallen in love with could not now be her husband. Winn's marriage put her in the humour which prompts women of a certain type to accept the first suitor.

Meantime the moments of keen suspense dragged on. Now the purser had come forward, and the strange lady was evidently making some explanation. Fanny's head was bent down, and—was it fancy?—he thought that she looked sorrowful, perhaps at the thought of bidding him adieu.

How long the scene lasted, he could not tell. On a sudden the purser, glancing towards him, cried stentoriously :

"Quick, steward, luggage of number three for the tender."

Philip, then, was returning to shore—but Fanny? His heart bounded; the number mentioned was of the lad's berth.

Hardly knowing what he did, he obeyed his chief's command in an incredibly short space of time. The exciting interview was soon over. Philip, having introduced Nadine, had taken cordial leave of his friends; Fanny, after being alternately praised and blamed, had now recovered her spirits, and gave her elate lover a sly look, as much as to say, "I am here to tease you still." Then the pair boarded the tender, at the last moment, Fanny despatching a cabin-boy with the precious case of plate and valuables, Philip's heirlooms.

Half an hour later the head cook, an enormous man, kindly of heart, but burly of manner, found O'Meara hidden behind a flower-tub in the pantry, sobbing as if his heart would break.

"What's that blubbering for?" he asked. "Shall I lend you one of my clean aprons? A pocket-handkerchief is of no use."

The steward recovered himself in a minute.

"I lost a sovereign ashore," he said; which was true, but his tears were tears of joy.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HOME-COMING.

WHAT was Mrs. Francis Winn's astoundment to find no one awaiting her at the railway

station, no Tommy and Jem in their new coachman's suits, with pony-carriage and luggage-cart! Not only had she duly announced arrival by post, but had telegraphed further orders to Fanny that very morning. Both letter and telegram must have gone astray, or something very wrong was the matter.

"You cannot surely expect anything else," Winn said, carelessly. "They are all away enjoying themselves, of course. We shall find old Betty, I dare say. She will do well enough."

Mary Ann eyed him, not wholly without suspicion. Was it possible that he had dismissed the servants without breathing a word on the subject?

"We shall get at the bottom of the mystery in half an hour's time. Why worry yourself about nothing?"

Then he leaned back in the cab, affecting drowsiness. Feverishly impatient, full of suspense and direst misgiving, with one hand on the open ledge, she kept keen look-out. After all, the clocks were perhaps wrong. Pony-carriage and luggage-cart were only a quarter of an hour behind.

Soon the sound of wheels was indeed heard in the distance; surely that must be Tommy—but no. The low, painfully dragged vehicle was only the rector's heavy old phaeton drawn by his blind mare. Next came the

noise of a light conveyance being swiftly driven—Tommy at last, making up for lost time. No, only the postman with his trim trap and brisk pony. Wheels again: two drivers side by side. Tommy and Jem gossiping on the way. But a third time her hopes were disappointed. It was only a couple of drovers. When Reedmere Hall appeared in sight, its unlighted windows, closed doors and gates, and general look of blank unwelcome, hardly awakened an additional fear.

The cab wheels grated loudly on the gravel drive; no one gave a sign. A second, a third time, the huge knocker of the front-door was plied lustily to no purpose. Winn then ran round to the back of the house, returning with a rueful face.

"The place is positively barred and bolted against us," he said, looking so amazed that her suspicions of the minute before were at once allayed. "We can't possibly get in. What is to be done?"

She was at first too consternated to speak, feminine mortification alternating with dark surmise. This, then, was the gratitude of her protégés, her subordinates! This was the welcome home of their benefactress! Instead of children offering flowers, bands playing, triumphal arches, fireworks—dead walls and desertion!

As the pair stood there, the heavily laden

cab still before the front-door, the sound of milk-pails was heard, and the figure of Betty appeared, issuing from the neat-house.

The old charwoman did not seem so much overcome by the apparition of her mistress as might have been expected. A clear conscience emboldens, and stone deafness, combined with an inability to read and write, were unanswerable arguments in her favour. She had no difficulty in laying the blame of this imbroglio on the right shoulders.

"There's letters for you, ma'am," she said, fumbling for the key of the kitchen door. "Dear, lawks - a - daisy, to think even that little hussey Lottie shouldn't be back in time! But I'll soon make some tea, and there is bread and butter and watercresses; and ham, sir," she asked, turning to Winn. "Shall I fry you a rasher or two?"

"By all means; nothing I like better," Winn replied, almost gaily. He began to suspect the true state of affairs, not sorry to believe that his own action had been anticipated, and that the parasites, instead of waiting to be dismissed, had dismissed themselves. But Philip, where was he?

Betty now threw open the shutters of the parlour and produced a packet of letters. Mrs. Winn tore open the first envelope, which was in Mr. Don's handwriting. His much esteemed friend and employer would hardly be surprised at the decision he had

arrived at, the missive ran, namely, to retire upon his modest competency and, like herself, exchange a celibate condition for the marriage tie. She would ere long hear of his union with a lady of title and distinction.

"Heavens alive!" cried Winn. "Well, her ladyship will have diverting company and no cook to pay. But the ham is fried, and the tea made. Won't you come to table?"

She made no answer, and opened the second letter, which informed her in somewhat gushing and ungrammatical terms that Fanny, tired of service, had sailed for New York, and on reaching that city was to be married to a Mr. Walter O'Meara, an African gentleman.

"Well done, Fanny!" cried Winn. "I never accredited you with sense enough to judge a man by himself, rather than by his skin. What a pretty contrast the pair will make! But do, my good Mary Ann, come to tea; I am literally ravenous."

Mrs. Winn smiled at her spouse contemptuously, as Marie Antoinette upon poor Louis XVI. when eating peaches in the Assembly, motioned him to begin, and opened a third note. Tommy wrote briefly and straightforwardly. He wanted to see the world, he said, and had heard of an excellent opening in the Transvaal. He hoped to return home worth millions.

"I don't blame you, Tommy. Be honest; make a man of yourself," remarked Winn. "But does nobody so much as mention Philip? Where is he?"

A fourth envelope, bearing a crest, was now opened, and its contents read and re-read by Mrs. Winn, with changing colour and trembling fingers.

"Is Sir Vernon mad?" she cried, pushing the letter towards Winn. "They may threaten as they will. I will not give the boy up."

The old baronet's note, a model of pencraft, although from the hand of a septuagenarian, was to the following purport:—finding himself unexpectedly called upon to undertake the joint guardianship of Philip Summerhill, he wrote, he should be glad to confer with Mrs. Winn respecting their ward, any day and at any hour that might be convenient. In the meantime the boy was well and happy in his new home.

"What does it mean?" she asked, refusing to believe the promptings of her own judgment.

"What does it mean?" repeated Winn, with a look of unmistakable concern. "It means that a fraudulent trustee is amenable to criminal law. It means that you will have to answer for Philip's heritage, every fraction of it, as handed over to you twelve years ago."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NADINE'S TREASURE TROVE.

A FEW days before this home-coming, Nadine had lighted upon a curious and unexpected discovery. The enormous mass of correspondence, entrusted to her by Sir Vernon for examination, had now diminished to one drawerful. As the hour of final departure was drawing near, she felt anxious to finish her task. On inspecting the contents of the drawer, a large packet immediately attracted her notice. It was labelled in a feminine hand: "Letters received during my husband's illness, to be answered on his recovery." The date coincided with that of an attack of fever at Rome, a few years before, to which Sir Vernon had often alluded.

On untying the string, she found that several of the letters had never so much as been opened at all, Sir Vernon evidently wearying of his business, ere half done, and setting it aside to some future opportunity, which never came.

Although an exact man, and very practical in matters of practical concern, he had never been a good correspondent. He held the opinion of the first Napoleon, that ninety-nine letters out of a hundred, if left unanswered, answer themselves in six

months. The penny post, he said, was but another name for one man's or one woman's infinite capacity to bore another. But for the penny post, he would laughingly add, the breakfast table would be the best morsel of the day; as it is, we have to swallow a pill before enjoying the twelve hours' allotted good fortune, or evil, or humdrum comfort. Letters, letters; why on earth should a man's time be spent in reading or writing letters, when he can chop wood, drive a waggon, or weed a turnip-field?

These neglected missives seemed in truth deserving of no better fate. The first contained a favourite nostrum for Roman fever, as if neither physician nor pharmacy existed in the Eternal City; a second begged Sir Vernon to look out a choice antique for the writer, "something in the bronze way, classic and cheap." A third contained the query if he wanted a pair of swans; a fourth recommended to his notice a certain hotel in a certain town of the Riviera; a fifth was from a poor curate asking the gift of a worn-out basket chaise; the sixth, at once riveted Nadine's attention.

It was a large, thick, business-like letter, and on breaking the seal, she saw that it was from a lawyer, enclosing the copy of a testamentary document.

Could she believe her eyes, her senses? Almost the first words she lighted upon was the name Philip Summerhill!

She read, re-read, and read again. Yes, it was true; the facts were as plain as daylight. The paper she held in her hand, codicil to the will of a certain Andrew Carruthers, named Sir Vernon Vernon as his successor to the co-trusteeship, with Mary Ann Harpfield, of Philip Summerhill!

Nadine flew downstairs to find Sir Vernon frowning and biting his lip over a missive of quite another kind, an epistle in his steward's handwriting, only that moment arrived by post.

"Oh! Sir Vernon," she cried, "such news, such news!"

He laid down his letter with a rueful expression.

"Oh! Nadine, such news, such news!"

"Do hear mine first," she began. "Philip Summerhill——"

"Do hear mine first," he broke in. "Philip Summerhill——"

"Oh, may I not say what I have to say?" she said. "Give me one minute, Sir Vernon; the poor boy is saved."

"Give me one minute, Nadine; the poor boy is lost."

Then they listened each to the other's story, finally exchanging missives, Sir Vernon retiring to the bay-window to ponder over Nadine's discovery. Nadine slowly and painfully read the announcement of Philip's flight. Knowing the interest taken by his employer

in Philip Summerhill, wrote the agent, he felt it his duty to inform him that he had quitted Reedmere Hall in company of the young woman Fanny Farthing, several days before, and that no one on the premises had the remotest idea of their whereabouts.

Nadine lost not an instant. To make the strictest inquiries, to trace the fugitives to London, to Liverpool, finally on board, arriving only just in time to prevent departure, all this was the work of two days only. No hesitation seemed possible. Philip at once decided to return with her, having first taken cordial leave of Fanny and her suitor, assuring them over and over again that the promised reward should be paid.

"If it is true that I am not to go back to Harpie, as Nadine says, you shall have your thousand pounds long before I am of age. They have both been so good to me, Nadine," he said. "I wish we could all go to Australia together, you and I, with Fanny and Mr. O'Meara," whereupon Mr. O'Meara blushed, and Fanny stammered out her thanks.

So once again Philip Summerhill found himself in the position of Calderon's hero—the captive of yestreen, a prince to-day, a prison suddenly exchanged for a throne. Which was the truth—which chimera? Never before had existence seemed so dream-like, so enigmatic. Nadine, between smiles and tears, assured him over and over again that he

was free, master of his own destinies. It could not, could not be!

In a subtler sense still, the poor lad fancied himself the victim of a delusion. Had he only drowsed, or had he been ill? Was his dream a recurrence of his old malady, a fainting fit with its well-remembered, half-painful, half-pleasant return to consciousness? Yet Nadine would not deceive him. Upon her word he could rely under any circumstances.

"You will believe everything by-and-by, when you see Sir Vernon," she said. "I wanted to be the first to tell you the good news. Oh, Philip! I am so happy to see you happy!"

He held her cool hand to his flushed, tear-stained cheek, by little and little shaking off painful doubt. Nadine had rescued him, they should never be separated any more. Quiet tears came to his relief.

"Tell me all about it," he murmured. "What makes Harpie willing to let me go? How can Sir Vernon take me away?"

"You shall learn presently; but there is one disappointment in store for you," she said, anxious to divert his thoughts. "I told you—do you remember it?—in the bean-field that you would be rich. That is no longer the case. A great injustice has been done you by one whose duty it was to guard your interests. You are comparatively poor."

He hardly seemed to listen. He was

growing calmer now, and the joy of sitting by her side, holding her hand in his, overcame every other thought.

"Do you understand me?" she asked, feeling that she ought, in some degree, to prepare him for coming disclosures. "You are no longer heir to a large property."

"What does it all matter? I did wish to have plenty of money once, though—can you guess why?"

"In order to enrich your friends, I dare say."

"You must understand me," he said, and again a look of mingled doubt and rapture came into his face. "Nadine, is it true—am I indeed to go with you, never to be separated from you any more? That is all I care about now. It was you who found out that I was no idiot, and could learn like others. Oh, it was cruel, heartless of Harpie to treat me so! Think of what my life would have been without you, with nothing to learn, nothing to love!"

He went on impetuously, all timidity overcome for a moment in the desire to make her realise his feelings.

"You were the first to care for me, and to believe that I could care for any one. If I lived a hundred years, I could never be grateful enough, never love you half enough, but I will try."

Tears checked his utterance, and, blissful as lovers, the pair talked of the golden future.

Nadine's happiness was, perhaps, the most exquisite of the two, since all his thankfulness, all his joyful looking forward, were due to her. How small now seemed the sacrifice, the year of her life dedicated to a suffering, neglected lad, twelve months of her career set apart for the working of an individual cure! Again and again she had hesitated, asking herself: "Am I not waging a fruitless warfare; of what good are my efforts?" And again and again she bowed to the dictates of conscience. She must rescue Philip because there was no one else to do it. He was now safe. The first contest of his existence had ended in victory. She might well triumph.

Meantime an interview of very different character was taking place in another room: Mrs. Winn frigidity itself, Sir Vernon matter-of-fact, as if sitting on the bench.

"I am sorry to have to receive a visitor on business so unpleasant," he began. "My own letter has partly prepared you for further communications. With the contents of your husband's note to myself you are, perhaps, fully acquainted. Mr. Winn informs me that he has begged you to accompany him to the colonies, there by your joint efforts to try and win back a portion of the squandered trust funds. It is to be regretted that you refuse these overtures. Would you meet him half-way, far more painful experiences might thus be spared you."

"I am responsible to no one concerning Philip Summerhill," she began, defiantly.

"Pardon me. We are all responsible to the law. Heaven help the orphan if it were not so."

"Many speculations that turned out unfortunately were made on the boy's behalf, and in his own interest; many investments of twenty years back, have since lost half their value. When Philip is of age, let him proceed against me if he chooses."

An odd smile rose to Sir Vernon's lips. He had not the faintest desire to humiliate the culprit, he wished, on the contrary, to spare her as much as possible, yet he secretly chuckled over the two unanswerable arguments held in reserve.

"Much good would it do the young man to go to law about nothing!"

"The rest of his money is safe enough," she retorted. "I have given up the establishment; I shall live abroad with the boy economically; there is no more to be said."

"Not so fast, Mrs. Winn, if you please. What Philip cannot do for himself, but what the law will do for him, is to secure the remnant of his fortune."

"Who represents the law?" was the scornful query. It did not seem clear to her as yet that Sir Vernon could do more than Winn had done—exhort, appeal, remonstrate.

"Who? Myself, and by right of two

excellent titles. You shall be acquainted with one at a time. Now for number one."

The old baronet's behaviour had wholly changed now. He lost sight of the fact that the well-dressed lady was Winn's wife; he was only mindful of her cold, calculating fraud and unabashed pertinacity. His old-fashioned urbanity gave way to an abrupt, catechetical manner. The magisterial air of authority acquired on the bench asserted itself. Truth to tell, Sir Vernon relished a brisk passage-of-arms when there was no room for compassionating the vanquished.

"In the first place," he began, "I have only to lay before you this paper. It is an exact statement of Philip Summerhill's fortune as it passed into your trusteeship, twelve years ago, and as it now passes out. The capital bequeathed to the poor lad in his infancy has melted away in your hands, it seems, to less than an eighth of the original sum. The heir to thirty odd thousand pounds has only just five left—that is to say, a bare pittance. When such facts as these are put before me, I am in my right—it is my duty as a magistrate—to interfere."

He now produced a second paper from his pocket-book.

"My second title to intervention on Philip Summerhill's behalf enables me not only to secure the remnant of his once handsome fortune, it authorises me to take the

guardianship of the lad out of your hands, at once and for all. You are of course aware that a trusteeship, like any other charge, can be handed down by will. Philip Summerhill's father appointed, as your co-trustee for the lad, an old friend—rather, I should say, acquaintance of my own—by name Carruthers. By a testamentary document, the existence of which only came to my knowledge this very day, this gentleman nominated me as his successor to the trust. Here is the deed duly signed and witnessed."

He held the papers before her, but she refused to read. The faint hope remained that this last claim could be contested.

"How can I tell that the deed is genuine?" she cried. "I will obtain legal advice. I will not give up the boy!"

"Nonsense!" Sir Vernon said, impatiently. "You know as well as I do that you have not forgers and perjurers to deal with. Instead of wasting words, listen to me. We will have the lad down, he shall choose between us; and meantime," he said, looking at her with almost a solemn expression, "your own fate I will leave in his hands. If it were me you had to deal with"—he clenched his fist, and shook it in her face—"yes, if it were me alone you had to deal with, and no one stood in the way, you would fare all the worse. But we will have Philip down."

He rang the bell, and in a minute or two

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the pair were there. Nadine would infinitely have preferred to stay away. The notion of appearing to enjoy her own triumph was odious to her, but Philip entreated, and she thought it more prudent to accompany him. Who could tell what the glamour of Mrs. Harpfield's eyes might do in such a moment? The boy might succumb to an influence so potent throughout his childhood.

"Now, young gentleman," said Sir Vernon, placing a kindly hand on the lad's shoulder, "there is a good deal for you to learn about your own history, and you shall do so in the fewest possible words. This lady is no longer your sole guardian. I am the legally constituted representative of her late co-trustee, appointed by your father. You are not a baby; it is for you to decide between us two. Will you remain with Mrs. Winn, or place yourself under my care?"

Philip, pale and trembling, clutched Nadine's hand, and at the same time—he could not help himself—caught hold of his nurse's also. He did not love her, he had never loved her, but he had been dependent upon her from infancy; the force of habit was too strong. He could not bear to pain her or to seem ungrateful now. For a moment Mary Ann felt sure of victory. Philip would stand by her yet.

"You cannot decide?" Sir Vernon added, kindly. "Well, let me go on. Mrs. Winn

will herself tell you that if you owe her much for her past care of you in childhood, you have also much to forgive. She will tell you that she has not taken proper care of the money entrusted to her keeping; that in fact, far from husbanding your fortune, she has squandered it. Instead of being rich, you are now poor, and it is her doing."

Harpie was weeping now, not tears of contrition, but of appeal. She hoped to win Philip, to obtain the last, the most complete triumph over Nadine after all. Would the boy only say, "I stay with Harpie," she could bear the rest.

"You are old enough to understand that when people misappropriate or spend on themselves sums of money entrusted to them, they are amenable to the law, and liable to punishment," Sir Vernon went on. "The time will come when you will be called upon to investigate this matter for yourself, and to take the law into your hands. In the meantime you are old enough to understand how grievously you have been wronged, and how great is the need of forgiveness."

"I don't want poor Harpie punished," sobbed the lad; "I don't care about the money, I forgive her."

"And stay with her," murmured the temptress, clasping him to her heart, weeping over him; "say—and stay with her, my own Philip, my precious boy."

"We will leave other questions for the present, till you are older; for the moment, this one only has to be settled," Sir Vernon said, now anxious to have the scene over, half fearing, with Nadine, lest the victim should be snatched from his rescuers still. "Come, Philip, you cannot surely hesitate? You will not surely trust yourself any longer with a false friend, a dishonest trustee? Here is your guardian angel," he pointed to Nadine, "she who restored you to health and taught to believe in yourself; can you waver for a moment when the choice lies between white and black, the true and the false, fairness and devilry? Are you dreaming?"

The boy was indeed for a moment wavering. It was as Nadine feared; the old glamour held him captive, Harpie's whispered words, her caress, her kisses, made him feel helpless as a child. He did not speak because he could not; his very limbs seemed paralysed; left to himself, he must have succumbed. But Nadine came to the rescue. Not heeding her antagonist's look of hatred, paying no attention to Philip's tears, she laid a firm, gentle hand upon his arm, and forcing him to look into her eyes, said:

"Your promise, Philip; do you remember your promise?"

That remonstrance gave the boy all the strength and power of resistance he needed. He tore himself from his nurse's arms, and

without looking back, perhaps not daring to look back, cried :

"I am very sorry for you, Harpie. I shall try to love you when I am away. I don't mind a pin about the money ; but I will never live with you any more."

CHAPTER XXIX.

PHILIP'S DREAM.

A DAY or two after this scene, with elbows on the table and cheeks buried in his hands, before him his beloved Euclid, the open Sesame of fairyland, Philip mused and dreamed.

How wondrous was the life of knowledge, how heavenly the gift called mind ! He recalled, with extreme bitterness, the unsatisfying tasks forced upon him in early days under the guise of education, and it seemed to him that he was only now beginning to realise what the word meant. All his senses alert, around him stretching horizon upon horizon, an infinite future beckoned him forward. Young and artless as he was, he could sort the gold from the dross, discriminate the alloy from the pure metal now to be measured out to him without stint or spare. Oh ! how little he cared about being rich

now; all he yearned for was liberty to learn, the privilege to know! As he mused upon the revelations of the last few days and their bearing upon his own life, his musings took the shape of a waking dream. He forgot the fact of self-existence, he was nothing, and the dream all in all.

Leaning over his well-thumbed Euclid, he fancied he saw a dark, gloomy chamber, the interior of a prison cell. So feebly lighted the place, only a ray of day penetrating the barred window high above, that he could at first discern nothing, not even the figure of the captive crouching in despair on the floor. When at length the outline of a human shape became visible, there were audible also low moans, the piteous pleadings for a little light.

"Only to be able to see!" sighed the prisoner, "to obtain a glimpse of God's beautiful world outside; to be free to use the eyes with which Heaven endowed me!"

But no pitying ear heeded his complaints, food and drink were passed through the grate, the door remained barred as before. The noon-day sun slanted westward; outside, a glorious sunset flooded the world with crimson light; twilight, obscurity, enveloped the prisoner's cell.

"Oh! will not the great God in heaven take pity upon an innocent captive?" he moaned. "I feel how blessed the light is, yet it has never been mine. Day after day,

week after week, year after year, existence drags on in semi-darkness; death will overtake me ere I have realised what it is to live. The world is peopled with busy, happy beings, who see, who understand, who live indeed; why am I, having done no evil, thus cut off from the beams of day?"

No kindly rescue came; evening only brought intense gloom, and another and yet another day followed that were to him only so many nights, and still the prostrate prisoner wailed: "Light—give me light."

At last the door of his cell was opened, and two pitying voices, two beneficent figures bade him pass out. One was gentle and fair, the other manly and strong, and they led him between them, bidding him take courage.

Overjoyed as he was to quit those dreary, death like precincts, he staggered at first; the glare blinded him, his brain reeled, he was fain to re-enter the prison walls.

"Courage, courage," murmured his angelic deliverers; "a little while, and you will be able to gaze around unflinchingly as ourselves." So they guided him out of the horrid darkness into the wide, sunbright, sparkling world, the captive screening his eyes from time to time.

At first it was very little he had strength to gaze upon, a wayside flower, a bit of gold-green turf, a human form; but by degrees, and with each step forward, his powers of vision

increased, he could bear to glance at the silvery cloud, the distant sunlit hills, the skylark in arrowy flight.

Nevertheless, his seeing faculty was far from that of other men. Many brave sights he could not meet unflinching—the mountain cataract, the shooting star, the lightning flash; whilst any radiant object overcame and bewildered him. He was ready to weep with mingled joy and confusion.

Still his guides, the one so sweet and tender-voiced, the other so sturdy and inspiring, murmured:

“Courage, courage,” as they passed from marvel to marvel—snow-capped Alps, glittering avalanche, the boundless ocean; and all at once, it seemed by a miracle, he became conscious of clear, strong, vigorous sight; he could understand what he beheld, and gaze intently upon marvel after marvel without being blinded or dismayed. In a transport of joy, self-congratulation, and thankfulness, he turned to his deliverers, but they were no longer there. They had recreated the world for him, led him into the glorious regions of intellectual light; he must go forward alone!

Meantime, Sir Vernon was not the man to do things by halves. He set about the business entrusted to him, rather forced upon him by a message from the grave, with all

the ardour of his prime. Mrs. Winn, seeing that her choice might mean exposure and punishment, made no further resistance.

Philip's affairs were handed over to him, and with the least possible delay put into the strictest order. The boy was at once placed under the care of a tutor, who, with Nadine, was constituted co-trustee. The remnants of his fortune were got together and reinvested.

"We shall do better than we thought," said the old baronet, rubbing his hands. "What with Mrs. Francis Winn's elegancies in the way of furniture, equipage, and so forth, we shall scrape up five or six hundred pounds more than at first seemed possible."

"I suppose a small allowance will be paid to Mrs. Harpfield—Mrs. Winn?" Nadine said.

"Allowance! I allow that hussy anything?" thundered Sir Vernon. "Is a premium to be put upon pilfering? Do we remunerate pickpockets, thieves, forgers? My dear young lady, you are surely joking? Mrs. Francis Winn may thank her stars that her allowance is not a pretty long spell in Portland Prison."

Philip's affairs happily disposed of, what remained for Nadine but to go—or stay? And once more that pathetic plea greeted Nadine's ears, the plea of an old man's love.

"Do not leave me, dearest," he said,

clasping her hand, a tear in his eye, a smile on his lips. "For you the day has only just begun, noontide is as yet far off, the long, long afternoon, the slow twilight hours are all to come. But for me the sun has only a parting ray, one bird more will twitter on the bough. I shall catch another glimpse of the stars, and then fall asleep. Will you grudge me your company for this little while? Will you let me go to my last rest, like an outcast, no loving voice to bid me good-night?"

She held his hand to her lips, torn by terrible conflict, the inevitable woman's conflict. Her mind was distracted by two-fold duty; she was wrestling with obligations to herself and to another. Could she forsake this loyal friend? On the other hand, could she give up the noblest aspirations of her life?

"It cannot be for long," he murmured. "Stay with me, not as a wife, but as a sweet friend, a daughter, if you will have it so. Only stay, I cannot lose you."

Those last heart-broken words decided her; she stayed, finding in the love and gratitude of these two, more than compensation for such self-sacrifice.

EPILOGUE

It is New Year's Day in a Northern capital ; a charming drawing-room shows preparations for holiday guests. Its occupant was one of those sweet, yet strong, pensive-browed women, who retain the freshness of girlhood when girlish years are long past. There is no greater error than to suppose that intellectual work and intensity of purpose age a woman. The perpetual youthfulness of spirit imparts outward youthfulness also. It is small cankering cares of a personal nature, the fretfulness born of a poor life, and constant self-repression, the conviction of insignificance and littleness, that line the brow with care, sharpen the features, and lend a look of years to the once lissome figure.

The lady moved to and fro, now adding a last touch to her pretty tea-table, now glancing at the wintry streets. The long reign of ice and snow had fairly set in, and the warmth indoors made the outer world seem doubly dreary.

"Will he come? Will they come?" thought Nadine, as she watched the fast falling snowflakes, and pictured to herself the long and almost interminable railway journey across Europe ; but the next moment she smiled. "Of

course they will ; why should they not ? Is a snowfall so appalling to two men, both in perfect health, the one in his prime still, the other in early manhood ? ”

On a sudden the bell was rung. Flinging the door wide, she saw two figures covered with snow, eager to stretch out their hands and clasp her own, yet not daring to cross the threshold. They greeted each other half rapturously, half timidly, after the manner of long-parted friends ; then followed a stamping of snow-clogged boots, a shaking of wraps, a drying of damp locks and beards ; at last the two overjoyed guests joined the hostess in the bright, welcoming room.

“ Now for Philip’s great news,” were Winn’s first words when the hand-shaking was over. Could this be the delicate lad Nadine had cared for a few years back ; this the Philip of former days ? Stalwart like Winn he would never be, his medium stature and slight build betokened a physique far from sturdy, yet nervous and elastic. A look, however, of bodily health was here, and the quick, penetrating glance betokened an intellect above the average. There was beauty, too, in the sensitive, delicately-moulded features, beauty no longer marred by the look of listlessness and indecision. Now Philip’s eyes were bright and steadfast, and every glance and gesture showed that quick insight into things and that ready perception which are akin to genius.

"Great news? Great news for a certain individual named Philip Summerhill, of no importance whatever to the rest of the world," laughed the young man, colouring. "A senior wrangler is only a small hero to himself."

"Philip a senior wrangler! Oh, is that true?" Nadine cried, with almost passionate delight.

"Come, Philip," Winn said, laying a fatherly hand on his shoulder. "Tell Nadine all about it. Don't leave the pleasant task to me."

But Philip could only stammer forth a bald account of what had happened. His career at Cambridge had indeed ended thus triumphantly; he was about to enter the lists of life wearing a laurel crown. As he went on, putting the case in the most modest, matter-of-fact way, he grew shyer and shyer. Nadine's rapture unmanned him utterly. He stopped short suddenly, with a tear trembling in his dark eye.

"I owe all to you two," he faltered.

The three clasped hands, much moved. Winn was the first to break silence.

"Something to yourself, still," he said, smiling. "However much a man may owe others, it must be so. It is the best kind of gratitude to acknowledge that."

"And now for your great news," Philip began, it being Winn's turn to falter.

"Nonsense, my lad, there is really nothing

to tell. Nadine knew that it would, that it must be so," he put in, colouring to the brow.

"Nadine shall decide our quarrel; Nadine shall compel you to yield," the young man continued.

"For Heaven's sake let it be, at any rate to-night. Don't listen to him," Winn implored, turning to Nadine. But Philip would have his way. No longer with painful hesitancy, with eyes seeking the ground and girlish blushes as when telling the story of his own success, he related every particular of Winn's noble restitution. The shame and wrong of the past were blotted out. Far away in new prosperous cities, he had manfully toiled for many a year. His task was ended. Every penny of the orphan's forfeited heritage was now paid back.

"But I cannot, I will not, accept it," Philip cried. "It would be an act of meanness. Tell him he must keep his money, Nadine. I have enough without it, and I intend to work."

Nadine looked from one to the other smiling. It did not seem to her that the matter was worth quarrelling about.

"You must appeal to me as umpire on more important occasions," she replied, in a playful tone, though in reality she was much moved. "But I am very glad. I cannot tell you how glad I am," she added to Winn.

"These good tidings bless the New Year beforehand." Then they sat down by the tea-table, and talked of all that had happened since they met last: the peaceful falling asleep of Sir Vernon, five years before; Nadine's return to her own country and work among the poor of her native city; of Winn's experiences in the New World; of Philip's college life. The happy hours fled all too quickly.

Neither that day nor the next, did Winn and Philip obtain what they wanted, a quiet tête-à-tête with Nadine. She was anxious to show them all the wonders of St. Petersburg, and could not understand their apparent indifference. Both were unfamiliar with European capitals, both were curious and mentally alert; their apathy and impatience over sightseeing puzzled and disappointed her. At last she was to be enlightened. By chance she found herself with Winn alone. Winn was hardly less changed in appearance than Philip. A touch of silver in his ample beard, added health and solidity of figure, a calmer, more resolute expression, lent to middle age a look of dignity and repose that had been wanting in youth. The wear and tear of colonial life had beautified him, his complexion had gained the rich bronze so envied of pale civilians, and he now wore the look of courage, endurance, and self-mastery seen in seafaring men.

It was easy to discern that he had suffered •

equally plain was the fact that out of more than one dreadful ordeal, he had come forth triumphant.

"I wanted to see you alone," he said, in the quiet, undemonstrative tones of a man who has composed his speech beforehand. Had not that speech been composed years ago?

"First, one word only about that person who was my evil genius. She has long since ceased to bear my name; you have not forgotten it? Our separation ended in divorce, six years ago, and she has since married again."

"Yes," Nadine replied, as anxious to get over the hateful theme as himself, "I saw the marriage of Mrs. Harpfield and Mr. Greenbank in the newspaper."

"That episode in my life seems like a nightmare now," he went on, looking at her earnestly. "I begin to shake off the memory as I have by degrees shaken off the pollution. Nadine, you must feel very differently towards me now."

"Dear friend, why such a question? You are my honoured friend; how I thank, esteem you for what you have done, you know already."

"Is that all you can give me?" he asked, with an expression impossible to misread. "Gratitude, esteem, can a man's soul be satisfied with these?"

"What answer would you have me make? You see what my life is here," she replied,

very sorrowfully, "it no longer belongs to myself."

"Nadine!" he cried, "never fear that my claims as a husband should interfere with self-imposed duties. I would not in any way alter your plans, or cut short your noble career. Only let me stay always with you. Give me a little affection in return for the love of years. And you are free," he urged, as he glanced at the mourning-ring on the third finger of her left hand. "I tried to comfort you when you told me that the lover of your childhood was dead, when the true friend of so many years, Sir Vernon, had gone also. But this also must seem like a dream to you now. Oh, let us both bury our sorrows and try to help each other! No one can do his work in the world whilst lingering by an open grave. Life sinks into mere nothingness if turned into a perpetual regret."

"We are friends," she cried.

"Friends, friends," he repeated, bitterly; "you forget the long years I have toiled, and hoped, and waited."

She was silent; even his own face hardly showed less sorrow. But she was sorrowing for him, her look of pain implied the terrible distance between them. He felt that further pleading of his cause could avail nothing, only deepen her grief.

"Why did I come here?" he murmured at last, and for a moment buried his face

in his hands. "Why have I thrown away my life? The folly was all my own; I had seen you, known you, ay, loved you, when I married that fiend in woman's shape! You are right, Nadine; no proud woman, no good woman, could act otherwise. The shame is mine to bear alone."

She tried to comfort him, but the time was not now. Her kind words, instead of soothing, stabbed like swords. At last she felt bound to tell him the truth.

"It is not pride, it is not goodness that makes me stand aloof. You must know it, my life, my heart, belong to another."

"Philip!" he cried, the revelation making him flush fiery red, and momentarily cursing himself for his blindness. Fool that he was, not to have divined the truth long ago! And the pair were matched in beauty, in intellectual ardour, and in graciousness. They were all in all to each other, he nothing. Before Nadine could utter a word of explanation, he was gone.

The love-making of forty and odd years, is not as the love-making of twenty-five. When that long, distressing interview had come to an end, and Winn, rambling aimlessly in the brilliant streets, was planning immediate departure, in came Philip. The stalwart, manly fellow was now blushing like a girl, trembling from head to foot, only able to falter out one syllable at a time.

"May—I—say something?" he stammered.

"Let me speak first. Dear, dearest Philip, how good it is to see you strong, happy, full of energy and ambition!"

"I owe it all to you," he said, "you have made me what I am, Nadine; but for you I should have dragged through life a helpless idiot. And you sacrificed years of your own for me——"

"They were not wasted. You know my motto, Philip—for one and the world! We must work for one first, for the world always! do the task that lies nearest, even if it makes us forget other duties."

"Mr. Winn was here just now," he murmured. "I know why he never speaks of returning to America. You look upon me as a boy, but I am a man, and I love you; I never loved any one else. I wanted to be free, to make my own way in the world, to achieve something, and all for your sake." He dashed a tear from his dark eyes, and added: "This success only made me proud, because I felt that I was now worthier of you. Lead your own life, be mistress of your own destiny, only let me have the right to be near you always."

"Do you forget that if you have reached manhood, time has not stood still with me?" Nadine said, gently. "To you I seem young still, dear Philip, the Nadine you first knew, but these intervening years have changed me

also. Could such love as this, the love of youth and middle age, make things equal between us, there would ever remain a gulf of past sorrows, past experiences, past illusions keeping us apart; you might see in my face looks of thought and memory you would not understand. Into your own dreams and aspirations I might not spontaneously enter. Yet," she added, fondly and earnestly, "yet we seem to belong to each other. Leave me free then to follow my own career, and we will work together, loving each other, helping each other, living as I have ever tried to do—for one and the world."

They clasped hands, and in his transport of pride and joy, the young man seemed suddenly to grow years older, whilst from Nadine's pure brow there passed a look of care. Younger even than the Nadine he first knew—she looked, as she repeated between tears and smiles:

"For ourselves we will work, but first for suffering humanity, for all creatures that suffer. For one and the world, Philip, for one and the world!"

THE END.

